CAPTAIN KETTLE K.C.B.

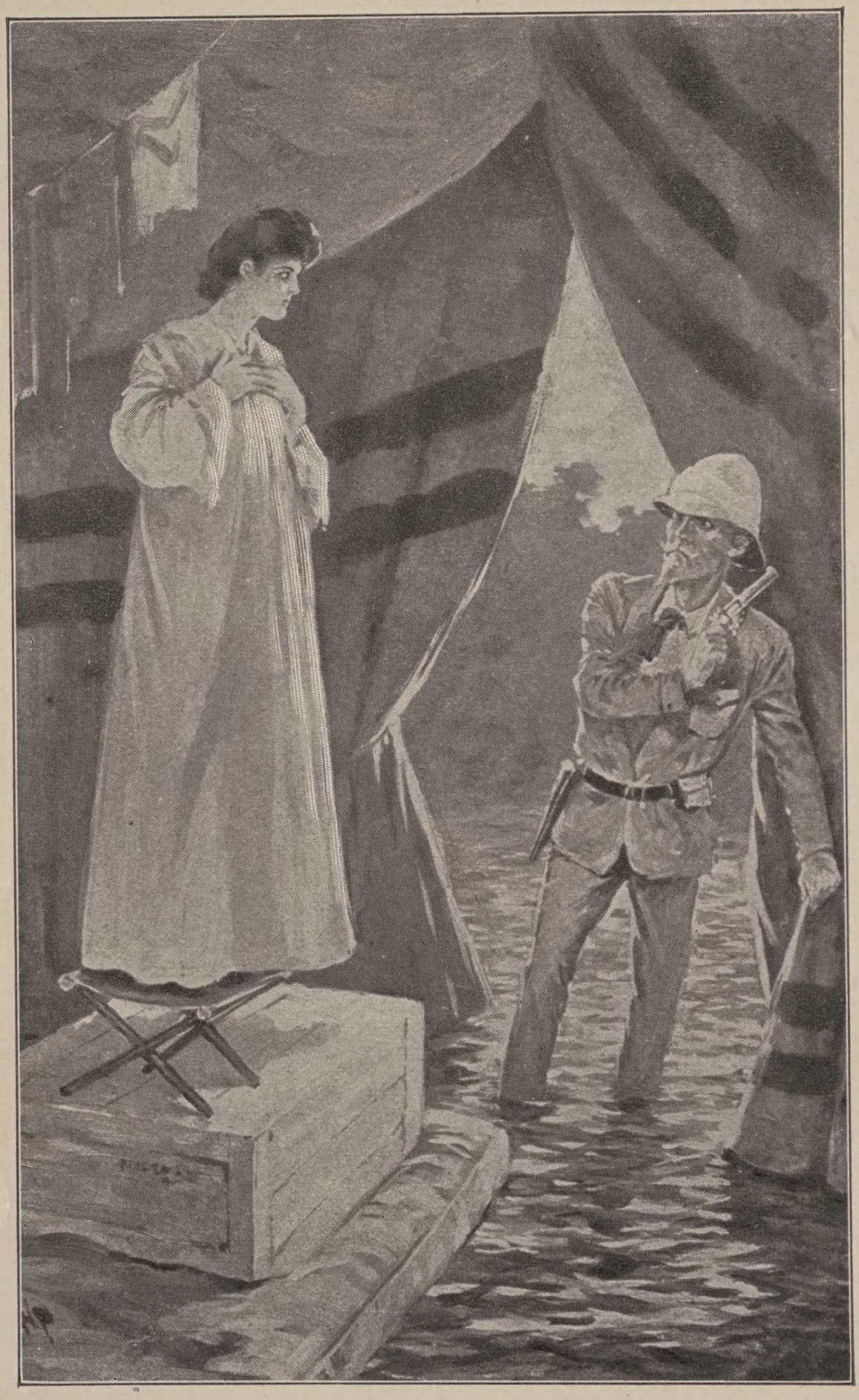
CUTCLIFFE HYNE

Class PZ3

Book H998Mo

Copyright No. copy 2

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.



HE WENT IN WITH HIS FIERCE LITTLE FACE DRAWN AND SET READY TO MEET SUDDEN DEATH, OR DEAL IT OUT.

MORE ADVENTURES
OF
CAPTAIN KETTLE
CAPTAIN KETTLE K.C.B.

BY
CUTCLIFFE HYNE
Author of "The Lost Continent," "The Derelict," "Adventures of Captain Kettle," etc.

NEW YORK
THE FEDERAL BOOK COMPANY
1903

PZ3
.H998Mo
Copy 2

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS,
Two Copies Received
MAY 12 1903
Copyright Entry
Jan. 3, 1903
CLASS a XXc. No.
49916
COPY A.

COPYRIGHT, 1901, 1902, 1903
BY CUTCLIFFE HYNE

Published March, 1903
Reprinted in March

CONTENTS.

PAGE.

CHAPTER I.
A Diplomatic Exchange..... 7

CHAPTER II.
The Carthaginian State Reserve..... 41

CHAPTER III.
The Tail-Shaft..... 72

CHAPTER IV.
Shanghaied..... 105

CHAPTER V.
The Submarine Boat..... 132

CHAPTER VI.
The Battle of the Bees..... 161

CHAPTER VII.
The *Frying-pan*..... 189

CHAPTER VIII.
A Cup of Tea..... 218

CHAPTER IX.
The Command of the Sea..... 246

CHAPTER X.
An Exchange of Legs..... 274

CHAPTER XI.
Limited Free Trade..... 303

CHAPTER XII.
The Last Adventure of Captain Kettle..... 330

MORE ADVENTURES

OF

CAPTAIN KETTLE

CAPTAIN KETTLE K.C.B.

CHAPTER I.

A DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGE.

THE British Resident leaned forward in his long chair and tapped his empty glass with his cigarette case. "I can give you no official leave, sanction or encouragement; so please understand that very clearly."

"I had grasped that much, sir," said Captain Kettle, "before you had got through with ten words of your story. But am I to understand that the Government authorities of the——"

Again the Resident interrupted hurriedly. "We will name no names if you please, Captain. If, when it is absolutely necessary, you refer to the

people in question as the Other Power, I shall understand you. I don't suppose any one is eavesdropping at the present moment, or naturally I should not be speaking at all. But one never can be certain about these things, and, if you please, I'd rather change the subject. Hang it, man," he added petulantly, "you know what's wanted: why make further palaver?"

The little sailor stroked his red torpedo beard. "Yes, sir, I know what's wanted well enough, and I'm always ready to do the British Government a good turn. I've a sincere affection for my country, and I'm sure the Government would be both surprised and gratified if they knew how many times I've stuck up for them already. But I can't afford to go into this matter purely for philanthropy and patriotism. This guano island speculation that I've been telling you about has dealt me a very severe blow financially. The difficulties of landing were enough to make you cry. The place was a regular graveyard of reefs. With the ghost of a bit of swell running, no boat could live among them, however cleverly you handled her. There was no fraud about the island; the guano deposits there had a richness beyond belief; but all I could do on the steamboat was to sit still and smell those riches from a distance, and watch my grub and wages' bills

mount up. I composed a little poem, sir, on the subject, entitled 'So near, and yet so far.' It struck me as both original and chaste. If you'd care to hear it, I have a copy in my pocket."

"No, no, another time, Captain," said the Resident hurriedly, and Captain Kettle sighed. "Of course I knew you were not exactly in luck's way, or you wouldn't have stepped ashore on the Red Sea bank at such a God-forsaken hole as this. I have even omitted to ask, you'll observe, how you got separated from that steamer you chartered to work your guano deposits, and I may mention that over yonder at Aden they're wild with curiosity on the subject."

The Resident nodded out across the veranda to where the Red Sea danced and glimmered like a sheet of burnished blue metal under the deluge of sunshine. "Very active people over there at Aden," said the Resident meditatively, "and they've got a most annoying lot of gun-boats in harbor always ready to send round to make inquiries. Have a cigarette?"

"I thank you, sir, but I never use them."

"Stronger meat for you, eh? Well, if you prefer to stick to the cheroots, the box is beside you. You see I'm by no means harrying you. I'm sure I am very sorry for your misfortunes. Naturally

you want to make as much out of this new thing that's put in your way as possible, and all I can say is, that what loot you can get depends on your own ingenuity."

Kettle shook his head gloomily. "It's very vague, sir, that. I'm sorry to be so pressing, but the fact is I've a wife and daughters to think about. They're on a little farm at home, and you know what farming is. We've a mortgage on the stock, and I did look to that guano spec. to pay it off. Guano seems so poetically appropriate to assist farming. But now that's failed, I've got to provide the interest on that mortgage somehow, and the rent, or there's my family turned adrift."

"Well, the job's waiting for you."

"What you offer, sir, is so very vague."

The Resident shrugged his shoulders with some impatience. "It's the best I can do. I can hand you a small sum of money to free you from your present embarrassments, and to start you off up-country, and after that I'm afraid I shall have to disown you officially and every other way. Even this small sum will have to come out of my private purse. And then there's the risk. I suppose it is that which scares you, and, indeed, I don't see why it should not."

The little sailor stiffened sharply out of his de-

jection, and sat upright in the chair. "The risk, sir," he said acidly, "you may leave out of the question. I'm the least easily frightened man on earth when once I meet with opposition, either from black men, or from white."

"Then," replied the Resident, with some dryness, "if the risk does not frighten you, and your needs are as great as you say, I should advise you to start off without further delay and get that loot. It's there right enough."

"You've not said that in so many words before. Are you sure?"

The Resident lowered his voice till it became almost a whisper, and leaned across to Captain Kettle's ear. "My agent saw the loads made up. We've had our attention on the—er—the Other Power along this side of the Red Sea for some time, and have been watching them more narrowly than they've any idea of. They know to a certain extent that we've been keeping a brotherly eye on them, because they tried to brazen it out. The Governor there wrote to me for permission for a trading party to pass through our Somaliland territory to trade and shoot in the interior beyond. I wrote back very politely that I could not give permission, as the district was too dangerous for travelers."

"But that's not diplomacy, sir, is it? It's merely

the truth. The Mad Mullah's 'out' just now, isn't he, and the country's alight?"

The Resident chuckled. "Diplomacy isn't necessarily all lies, Captain. Sometimes the truth is more convenient. It was no news to them about the Mad Mullah being 'out.' The trading party were simply taking up arms for that person to use against us. See?"

"Perfectly, sir. And so the Governor wrote back that you could go to blazes, and the expedition would trade as it jolly well liked?"

"Pooh!" said the Resident. "That's not diplomacy, my dear Captain. A letter like that might very well bring about war between England and—er—the Other Power at touchy times like these. No, the Governor wrote back most civilly, thanking me for my warning, and stating that he had refused the expedition his leave to start. But at the same time his polite Excellency gave that expedition a firm hint to start without leave, and away they went."

"Then I don't see," said Kettle doubtfully, "what's wrong with your sending some of your own troops to cut them off. I've no very high opinion of soldier officers, as I've mentioned frequently; but surely they are equal to a small job like that?"

"Oh, the soldiers could snaffle them easily enough

if I chose, but if the beggars were caught officially, don't you see, they'd think of their own skins first, and let on that his Excellency the Governor had sent them, and then—well, then there would be a row. Let me tell you, Captain, there's enough fat in the fire already between Great Britain and—er—the Other Power, and I shouldn't be thanked for dropping in the extra handful which might well set half the world in a blaze. Come, man, you must see which way the cat jumps now. It's a case for nice diplomacy."

It was acting on these somewhat obscure hints and instructions, then, that Captain Owen Kettle found himself traversing a portion of British Somaliland, with the attendance of a party of forty-three armed natives. By daytime he had to evade the bands of the Mad Mullah, the local faction fights which are always set up in a disturbed country, and incidentally to keep out of the way of those tiny armies of British native troops which were doing their best to hammer the country into quietude again.

By night, when the lions sang their lullabies, he had personally to attend to the fires and the thorn zareba, as no amount of hard handling and hard language would make his Mohammedan following careful in this direction. Their theory was that if

it was written that lions should devour them, this would surely come to pass. Wherefore it was entirely useless to stay awake on sentry-go, unless perchance they were encamped in the neighborhood of a hill of red ants. The which was consistent, of course, but irritating to a non-fatalist leader. However, when it came to fighting, they showed up artistically enough to satisfy even such a connoisseur as Captain Kettle.

The country was, as I have said, in a state of considerable turmoil, and it was Kettle's object to thread his way as nicely as might be between the various centres of disturbance, so that he might arrive at his final destination with a force if possible undiminished. He had a constitutional distaste for avoiding a fight, but the needs of his wife and daughters at home were always at the back of his mind, and he did constant violence to his own appetites on their behalf.

But there is a limit to the forbearance of all men, and Captain Kettle's was reached when one day, on topping a rise, he saw in a pleasant valley immediately beneath him, a battle displayed in full working order. A small force was holding a village of wattled huts, a larger force was attacking with savage ferocity, wounded writhed here and there, twisted dead dotted the ground, a field gun

coughed spasmodically, a hut burned, and a dazzling sun dished up the whole scene into the plainest possible view. Even then he had it in him (remembering those at home) to have retired quietly from the ridge. But a tall white man showed among those who defended the village, plainly leading them, and as the attack pressed more ferociously, the white man showed more, exposing himself with the utmost of recklessness, and doing prodigies of valor to inspirit his desponding troops.

That tall white man held Kettle's admiration, and clogged his retreating feet, and presently, when it was plain the village would be rushed by overwhelming numbers, the kinship of blood boiled within him so strong that the last taint of his prudence evaporated.

To give them their due, his native following were willing always for warfare, and he had little trouble in hustling them to cover along the brink of the ridge, and when the word was given, they loosed off their fire as fast as their dusky fingers could slip cartridges into the Remingtons.

The effect was sufficiently surprising. The attacking army in the valley below them halted in its advance, and began to make aimless little rushes to this side and to that. One of the panics so common to undisciplined troops had gripped them, soul and

bones; and when one, more ingenious in his fright than the rest, hit upon a line of flight, they tailed in after him as fast as their toes could spurn the ground.

The tall white man of the village with his own hands helped with the gun to bedeck their departure, and he was engaged in firing a final shot, when Captain Kettle and his tail marched up to make his acquaintance.

"I trust, sir," said the little sailor, "that you will pardon my interference, but it struck me at the time I chipped in, that those beggars had about given you your bellyful."

"Don't mention it," said the tall man, laughing. "They'd have got us as sure as cooking if you hadn't helped. They were some of the Mad Mullah's crew, and regular devils for fighting. To tell the truth they've been chivvying us for three days, and have got all our truck, pretty nearly. It was all we could do to save this rotten little pop-gun here. Hayden's my name, by the way. You don't happen to have such a thing as a whiskey and soda among your loads, do you?"

"I'm traveling very light myself," said Kettle evasively, "and the whiskey was forgot to be put in. I'm sorry. I should have liked very much to have drunk your health."

Hayden stared. "Oh," he said, "I beg your pardon. I thought you were some swell come up here lion-shooting."

"I don't know, sir," said the little sailor with a flush, "that my personal status is any concern of yours."

"Of course it isn't, not a bit. Please believe that I didn't intend to be in the least rude. One's been up-country here so long among natives that one's forgotten how to speak ordinary civil English. Of course I'm infinitely obliged to you for saving me and some of Britain's dusky forces from being wiped out. But you see, being in command of this district, one has to fill up official forms and things, and I'm just now wondering as to what you might be up here after."

"Then, sir, you may enter under the heading of 'occupation' that I am 'engaged on urgent private affairs.' That's true, and it's diplomatic."

It was Hayden's turn to blush now. "You make things very awkward for me. You have just put me under a tremendous obligation, and so I can't possibly arrest you, which I rather believe it's my duty to do."

"Oh," said Kettle stiffly, "don't let that stand in the way, sir. You may arrest me if you're able; but I've been bidden to use diplomacy over my pres-

ent errand, and I'm going to use it now or know the reason why. So I must bid you now good afternoon."

The little sailor whistled his natives together, gave a direction to the headman, and set the caravan once more upon the march, himself waiting to act as rear guard. Hayden stood uncomfortably at his side, feeling to the full the embarrassment of the situation.

The long snaky line of the forty-three men, some with loads on their heads, all with rifles, at last got into swing, and Kettle fell in at their tail. "Good-by, sir," he said, as he stepped off.

"Good-by," said Hayden, thinking hard. "Much obliged to you. Fall back on me if you get into trouble further on." And with that he turned and set about giving orders for the burial of the dead and the tending of the wounded. But presently he made up his mind, and went to his fellow white man, who was doctor to the force. "Pat," he said, "look here; that little chap with the red torpedo beard isn't up here lion hunting, and he isn't up here exploring. He can only have one possible game, it seems to me, and that's mischief."

"Well, you can't shoot him out of common decency, after pulling us out of the fire the way he did."

"Quite so; but we can follow him up and spoil his game."

"Ye—es."

"We must. He's on the make; you can see it in his eye. There's only one kind of commercial spec. that would pay in British Somaliland at the present moment, and that's taking arms and cartridges to the Mullah. The old scoundrel's got plenty of money, and he will pay handsomely if he's approached in the proper way."

"But the small chap hadn't got the arms with him—or at least very few."

"Oh, that's all right. The cargo couldn't be shipped on our sea-board. That'll come from the next territory, and he'll rendezvous with it at a fixed spot, and come into touch with the Mullah on the road, and make arrangements about price and delivery. You have to go through these preliminaries when dealing with Mad Mullahs, or otherwise, if you are found personally convoying the guns, they just shoot you, and collar the swag."

"Sweet lot."

"Aren't they? Well, get your invalids into hammocks, and away we go on our friend's trail. We'll deal tenderly with him because he's been nice to us—although to me personally he was most ob-

jectionable. But we must upset his little game, because that's duty."

Here then was a surprising result yielded up by Captain Kettle's attempt at diplomacy. A more experienced officer might by tact have discovered more of the truth, or by induction have guessed at it. But Hayden was merely an ordinary militia subaltern, with more adventurous spirit than brain, who was seconded from his regiment, and attached to a corps of native levies; and up-country in Somaliland he had learned more about rough-and-tumble rely-on-yourself fighting than about the exigencies of politics. That Kettle was in some way connected with arm-smuggling with the enemy he guessed quite correctly, but that the British Resident in one of the Coast towns could be the little sailor's backer was quite beyond his conception.

Captain Kettle on his part marched on with an equable mind. He had yielded to the impulse of saving a man of his own color; but he had not truckled to him in the least; and had preserved his own independence and respect. Moreover, though the opportunity lay open to him, he had not lied about his business. But at the same time he felt that he had concealed it entirely, and plumed himself on his diplomatic skill in doing so.

His onward progress was not unattended with

casualties. Like many another commander before him, he carried no stores of provender. His impedimenta consisted of rifles and ammunition. And following the innumerable precedents of other military expeditions who for various reasons have had to travel light, he lived upon the country. Of course Somaliland is not England, or even the United States; but even Somaliland at times objects to the comparative stranger who comes to live upon it, and being a primitive country, is apt to translate its protests into active measures.

There were times indeed when Kettle and his merry men had to retreat, and that hurriedly, with hunger gnawing at their belts, and despair sitting heavy upon their shoulders. There were other times also no less terrible, in the deserts, where they fought for the possession of some well, and were beaten off with swollen tongues and with leathern throats, to march on under the parching sun to the next water, or die by the way as seemed them best.

The original forty-three dwindled in this process, but the numbers of the company were kept up by those rough-and-ready means which are native to these countries of low civilization. The sentiment of loyalty there means loyalty only to the master for the time being, and a prisoner made one day might very well be fighting bravely against his former

friends on the next. As to the question of arms, that adjusted itself. The Remington rifle is common currency in Eastern Soudan, Abyssinia and Somaliland. If a Remington was lost, the next new recruit used a spear or tree root, or whatever weapon offered till another Remington was recaptured. Such are the resources of a self-supporting force when under the command of a leader of Kettle's ingenuity.

His final exploit of capturing the expedition with the smuggled arms was brought off with an ease that was almost laughable. From information picked up from the villages through which it had passed, they had been on its trail for some days, and finally, coming to the edge of a forest belt, espied it in a fortified camp in the middle of a small open plain.

To storm and capture this by open assault was a feat impossible even for a man of such desperate reckless bravery as Captain Kettle, with so small a following behind him, although the following by this time, to give them their due, would have gone anywhere the little sailor led them. But inside the zareba in the plain were two hundred men at the very lowest computation, and although many of these were officially carriers, there were naturally plenty of weapons available, and the East African

black is very adaptable in these cases. You may use him as a carrier for six days of the week, but this will make him act none the worse as a soldier on the seventh.

Captain Kettle halted his men inside the rim of the forest, and then, to prevent straggling, marched them half a mile back to make their bivouac. He issued orders to the headman to see that no one gave the alarm, and the headman (when Kettle's back was turned) translated this into a cheerful threat to crucify any one who made himself obnoxious in this way, head downward, over a slow fire. The which was quite in concord with the custom of the country and with all his friends' views.

So they set about their cooking quite unconcernedly, and watched the small white man who had led them go off to reconnoiter, placidly convinced that when they had eaten he would invite them to a fight that would be fully worth their attention. As has been hinted before, the Mohammedan negro of East Africa enjoys active warfare rather more than does the fighting Hausa of the Western Soudan, which is rather more than the average athletic Englishman enjoys a cricket or a football match.

Captain Kettle walked back to the edge of the forest growth, and taking his stand in the bush a yard

off the path, where a fringe of orchids and creepers screened him from any possible watcher, set himself quietly to prospect the resources and defences of the party before him.

The zareba, he noted with disgust, was an uncommonly strong one. They were out of the range of that country where the camel thorn grows, and at first sight he had concluded that the fence was one which could easily be pulled to pieces. But closer observation showed that it was built by one who took no superfluous chances. Its bushes were all of spiny, spiky wood, which would tear a bare skin like so much glass, and, moreover, these were woven together with no amateur architecture. A stream watered the camp, so starvation tactics could not tire it out.

Kettle bit his teeth round the butt of a dead cheroot, and puzzled over the situation. What had to be done must be carried through quickly. It was no place or season for dilatory operations. That swiftly moving person, the Mad Mullah, was in the immediate neighborhood, and it was well known that he had a scent for munitions of war surpassed by no nose in Africa.

Kettle stared at the encampment with the last of the afternoon sun, and stared on when the darkness of night had snapped down with its tropical

suddenness. The lights of the cooking fires gave up the camp as a vivid picture.

Gradually a scheme for its conquest unfolded itself to him, and then by degrees all its details were thought out and perfected. He wished to take no risks, and so he hammered at his plan till absolutely no flaw showed itself, and then, and not before, did he go back to his own bivouac and issue orders.

The men were well fed and rested, and ready for the work. The ghosts of the forests, which always parade and do their mischief in the darkness, were not there that evening, because Captain Kettle said they were not, and when the scheme was explained to them, the black men set about carrying it into execution with chuckling glee.

It had occurred to Kettle that the stream which watered the camp in the plain was capable of manipulation. The forest which sheltered his bivouac lay on a furrowed hillside, and the stream ran here also. It had dug for itself a ravine, and by Kettle's direction this cut was now being dammed. It was no common dam his followers built, either, but one more after the fashion of a sluice-gate, which at a given notice might be thrown bodily down.

Below in the camp on the plain the stream dried up, but no one gave the phenomenon any special notice. Up in the woods men toiled through the

hot damp night, tearing down branches, carrying turf and bush for the building of the dam. And behind its embankment the water in the ravine gathered and formed a quiet lake.

Three-quarters of the night through did this toil go on, and the negroes sniggered and gurgled in the darkness over their tragic joke; and then when a sufficiency of water had collected, and dawn threatened, Kettle led forty out toward the plain, and left the headman and two others to see to the breaking of the dam.

Punctually to its time the deluge welled out, swirling with its *débris* down the ravine, rushing through its old channel across the plain, and then brimming above the banks, and flooding the camp thigh deep, and sweeping the zareba hedge before it as though the stout interlaced bushes had been thistledown. The chilly surprise of it would have dampened the spirits of any troops; it daunted those inside the zareba beyond even Kettle's highest expectations.

When he and his company came splashing in behind the last wave of the destruction they had set loose, they met with no resistance. Not a rifle was fired against them, not a sword was lifted. There stood before them ranks of men dazed and dully submissive. If this sender of the waterspout wished to cut their throats, it was written that he did this

thing; if he merely wished to take them into his own slavery, again, it was Allah's will. There was but one Prophet, and every man's fate was writ large upon his forehead. It was impious to deny the Prophet, or to struggle against decided fate.

Kettle took steps to guard that there should be no reversal of this idea, by rounding up his prisoners under guard, and carefully depriving them of all utensils of defence; and then he began a search for the white man in command, who was the subject of that Other Power, and about whom the Resident had specifically given him information and instructions.

He had already in his own mind formed an opinion that either this individual was down with fever, or else was no small piece of a coward, or otherwise he would have shown fight, or at least have tried to put spirit into his men. A green canvas tent that showed dimly in the thinning night seemed to point to the white man's residence, and Kettle splashed toward it through the falling water, with a revolver muzzle against his shoulder in case of accidents.

The flap of the tent was pinned over with a thorn. He pulled it rudely open and stepped inside, with weapon ready to drop into instant use.

He went in with his fierce little face drawn and set, ready to meet sudden death or deal it out. A

moment later he had rushed out of the tent blushing scarlet all over his body.

The canvas house was dark when he stepped inside, and at first he had seen nothing. He searched the gloom with his eyes, following them with a revolver muzzle. Then a little feminine scream fell upon his drawn nerves like salt on a cut. There was a camp bed at one side of the tent, and on that a packing-case, and on that a chair, and on that again, with a head *en papillote* pressed against the roof, a pretty little lady dressed in an elaborate *robe de nuit.*

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, ma'am," gasped Kettle, and made his exit in the condition described.

Here then was a complication. Here was a jape for fantastic fate to play against him. A man he could serve with any indignity the moment suggested; but a woman! He blushed afresh at the thought of his encounter.

But as he cooled, the memory of his own womenkind at home and their needs came back to him and forced him to take action, however distasteful the situation might be to him. He could speak the language of the Other Power with inaccurate fluency. "Inside the tent there?" he hailed. "Will you tell me who is in command of this outfit?"

"I am," came the astonishing reply.

"Are you alone in there?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

"Then I must ask you, madame, to refer me to your partner. Where shall I find him?"

"I have no partner; the cowards were all afraid to come. I am here by myself."

Kettle cursed beneath his breath. "By James!" he murmured; "was ever any man in such a dirty fix?" But the thing had to be faced. He continued doggedly: "Then, if there is no one else, I must see you. Please dress, madame, as soon as you are able."

"Is that abominable flood over?"

"Yes."

"If it had not been for the rainstorm and the flood you never would have got here. I would have fought you. G—r—r—r! Yes, I have taught my black creatures how to fight admirably; but the water vanquished me, and Heaven sent the water. Yes, it is Heaven alone which has made me yield."

Kettle modestly let the credit rest at that; but he repeated his request for an interview.

"In a minute, monsieur, when I have dressed. If you are in more hurry, you must come and help me find my clothes which I saved with difficulty, and which are in terrible confusion. Will you help?"

Again the little sailor grew pink. "Oh, no hurry, madame. Get your things ship-shape in your own good time."

"Well, monsieur, I will be ready in one minute, then."

It was a long minute. Indeed, chronologically, it was fully one hour and a half before madame in the freshest of tropical apparel, and beautifully coiffured and complexioned, stepped out into a well-aired morning world. The camp had been swept and garnished, the zareba rebuilt, fresh fires lighted in place of those that were swamped, with prisoners and guards hobnobbing over the breakfast-pots.

Madame's own body servant had been found and set to his usual employments, and Kettle presently saw himself sitting to a camp table under the shade of the tent-fly, and enjoying as *chic* a *petit déjeuner* as any man could wish for.

"I thought we could discuss terms better over our coffee," said the lady. "I confess to you freely, that the wet and the dark daunted me horribly. But here in the sunlight"—she flicked her eyes at him—"I do not think you will be very cruel to me."

"I must do what I came for," said Kettle, steeling himself.

"Ah, you English officers, you have no thought except for duty. To you a poor lady's feelings are

of no concern. You are an English officer, is that not so?"

"I have been given this job by the British authorities," said Kettle, feeling that here was a case for diplomacy. "But I am free to confess I did not expect to find a lady in command of this expedition, or I would not have undertaken to raid it. Madame, you should not have come. It is no place for you up here. Whatever made you attempt it?"

Madame shrugged delicately. It was *triste* at home. She wanted a new sensation. Since her dear husband died, there had been so little to amuse her. To meddle with international politics seemed such a deliciously risky game. So *chic*. So new.

"You may be very thankful I caught you up when I did. If you got into that Mullah's dirty hands, you'd have regretted it once, and that for all the rest of your life."

"So they said at the coast, but I didn't believe them. Monsieur my partner would not accompany me, so I came without him. It was so much more new to be alone. For a man there might have been danger, perhaps. For a lady, I do not think it. Monsieur the Mullah is a great general, and he will have his qualities like other men. I shall tell him that I am not British. When he hears that I have

brought him up these arms, I figure to myself I shall have his admiration."

"If he were anything but a savage," said Kettle gallantly, "you would have it in all abundance. But the Mullah is the Mullah. If you don't know about his little ways, let me tell you some of the tales I have gathered about him as I came up-country." And forthwith he reeled out a string of fantastic African horrors which any man may collect for himself as he traverses that sultry land.

The lady heard him without a shudder, fanning herself prettily. Really she had a most comely face, and her clothes and her hair became her amazingly. "But these poor Africans," she kept repeating, "consider their unfortunate personal appearance and their habits. Monsieur cannot compare me to these Africans. Nor would the Mullah."

"No, madame," Kettle would assure her grimly. "The Mullah would put you in quite another class. But I don't think you would like the result any the better for all that."

"It seems to me, monsieur, we are come to an *impasse*. May I hear what were your instructions with regard to me?"

"Shoot you, and bag the arms."

"How concise! And if I had been a man, you would have carried it out?"

"If you had fought. If not, there is the tree."

The lady delivered herself of a pleasurable little sigh. "It seems that I am wading in waters more deep than I thought. Indeed, I had only reckoned on the Mullah. The flood—and the pleasure of monsieur's society—were outside my calculation. Well, monsieur, I do not see how you could well hang me. If you would put my coffee cup upon the table? My arm is short. It seems I am so dependent."

"Of course I can't hang you; that's out of the question now. But what to do I can't see."

"It would be the truest gallantry if you could withdraw, and leave me to finish my journey, and test the chivalry of the Mullah."

"Out of the question, madame. And, besides, I take it you would have no wish to continue your journey without your cargo."

"Ah? So? It is the arms that attract you more than my poor self?"

"Madame," said Kettle simply, "those arms represent my wages, and the pay for my men, and I cannot afford to go back without them. We will, if you please, end this conference now till I see my way to decide upon the disposal of such a lady as yourself."

Now in the meantime Hayden had been following up Captain Kettle and his company with remarkable

closeness, and his advance scouts had even been in time to see Kettle's headman and helpers knock down the dam which was used with such strategical effect. The scouts had the sense to drop down into cover, and return with their report without giving the alarm, and Hayden then made a further reconnaissance. As a result, he lay over that day where he was, dug an earthwork for his gun with great quietness during the ensuing night, at the edge of the open ground; and then when morning rose, pretended for the first time to discover that Kettle was in possession of the camp inside the zareba, and went forward in person effusively to greet him.

"Why, my dear chap," he said in return to the little sailor's dry salutations, "here was I thinking I'd stumbled across a nest of the Mullah's, or at any rate a nest of some joker who was smuggling in arms to that worthy man; and look, I've got all my ruffians nicely ambushed in the edge of the wood there ready to pour in a regular typhoon of lead, and my gun in an A 1 Woolwich emplacement. Dandy kind of trap for you, wasn't it? Left Doctor Pat in charge, because I thought I recognized you here just at the last moment. Wouldn't have inconvenienced you for worlds. I say, who is the lady?"

If Kettle had not met Hayden already and taken his measure, he would have put a pistol to his head

and ordered him to draw back his gun and men under pain of having his brains blown out. But each was fully aware that he had a coolly desperate man to deal with, and owned also that the other knew the fact. Kettle quite understood that Hayden would not give in, and that if he shot him, Doctor Pat had his orders to open fire at once, and told himself also that when the shells began to fall among the ammunition cases, the zareba would be no place to live in.

It did not take more than a breathing space to tot up all these points, and to decide that temporizing was the only alternative. Besides, there was to be faced the fact that he did not in the least know yet how to dispose of madame. So, by way of gaining further time for consideration, he introduced Hayden to her with all the formal politeness he could muster, and presently was standing by amazed at the result.

Himself he was a man immaculately neat in attire under whatever circumstances fortune might be using him, and he had all of a tidy man's contempt for squalor in clothes. Hayden was a very scarecrow. Bandages served him for boots, his putties were frills of rag, his breeches and shirt were of a coarse native cloth, vilely tailored, coat he had none, his helmet was a mere sack of broken tinkling splint-

ers of pith, and on his face there sprouted an unkempt beard which had never known scissors.

Madame, as has been noted above, was immaculate —a fashion block, as it were, in the desert. Oil and water, thought Kettle, could have no more chance of blending. But lo, in a minute, the pair of them had strolled off together on mutual invitation, and to look at them they might have had a year's intimacy as the ground-work of their talk. The curse of Babel, indeed, put many hindrances, one would have thought, on their interchange of ideas, as madame spoke but little English and Hayden had no other speech; but the volapuk of the eyes more than made up the difference. Kettle stared after them in their stroll with open-eyed amazement. "By James," he told himself, "the pair of them have gone and fallen in love with one another first bat-off, and that's what's the matter. By James, here's a go!"

It was truly an unlooked-for complication. Indeed, who would have thought that a British officer could possibly have an affair of this sort with a female smuggler of another nation, whom, had she been of a different sex, he would have blithely hanged or shot on sight. However, the vagaries of Cupid are beyond calculation, and presently when Doctor Pat (who gathered that there was to be no war) strolled up, he, after a very short study, pro-

nounced that it was "a case," and volunteered that he never knew Hayden "to be one of that sort before." However, as he announced that if the lady hadn't been taken up he should have gone for her himself, his opinion could hardly be looked upon as unprejudiced.

The three of them that night, after madame had retired, held a council of war.

"I'm thinking," said Hayden, "that we've been out here on the warpath long enough. The Mullah seems quiet for the time being. We haven't heard of the old blackguard cutting up anybody for over a week now. I think we'd better march down to the coast for orders."

"What about me?" asked Kettle.

"Oh, you'll come, too, I'm sure, won't you?"

There are some invitations which amount to commands. Captain Kettle wished there to be no doubt about his independence of action. "I should like to see any one in this section of Africa make me move where I didn't intend going."

"Quite so," said Hayden placidly. "But I'm beginning to fancy that you and I are after the same job, though we didn't seem to tumble to it before. I've been talking to madame."

"I thought you were," said the little sailor, whereupon the Irish doctor roared.

"Pat," said his superior officer, with a crimson face, "I'll wring your nasty little neck for you if you don't shut up. Of course, it remains to be seen what is to become of the loot."

"Not at all," said Kettle. "That's mine. The Resident offered it to me if I could lay hands upon it."

"I suppose he thought it was a man's property," said Hayden pointedly.

"I'm not in the least responsible for his thoughts," said Kettle with open truculence. "It's those guns and those cartridges I came out here to get, and at present they're mine both by promise and by right of capture. Sirs, both, I wish you good night."

In these minds, then, the party of them set off on the return march back to the coast, and a brighter and more charming companion than madame could not have been found within all the marches of Africa. Twice they had to fight their way, and the lady showed so gallant a front as to win even the approbation of that connoisseur of battle, Captain Owen Kettle. Hayden remained openly the devout lover, and as for Doctor Pat, he warned both of his male white companions, in plain Irish, that if they fell professionally under his hands he should speedily make a vacancy for himself.

"We shan't be able to get married yet awhile," the lady said to Kettle, when they halted for their last

camp before reaching the coast. "Cecil says"—it appeared that Cecil was the Christian name of Hayden—"that he has practically nothing beyond his pay. But I can't grumble at that, because, of course if he had means, he would never have been seconded from his regiment to come out here, and then I should never have met him at all. So we must remain engaged for a while till I can put together a little *dot* for myself."

"Then you have nothing, too, madame?"

"Oh, dear no. All my remaining cash was sunk in those guns and cartridges—your guns, Captain. But don't think I mind. You won them most fairly. And I have to thank you—and my petticoats—that I didn't get hanged into the bargain."

Captain Kettle sighed. He was thinking of his wife and daughters at home. But even for them he had some niceness as to how he earned the money which was necessary for their support, and there were places where he had to draw the line. Apparently one such had occurred here.

Next morning he was missing from the camp, and in his place was a letter addressed to the British Resident in the coast town which lay against the baking levels of the Red Sea below the hills.

"*Sir,*" it ran—"*I carried out your instructions*

with full diplomatic carefulness. Your Mr. Mullah will not get those rifles which I have annexed, as per verbal instructions. The Other Power has got its nose pulled. Had no opportunity to obliterate head of expedition as suggested, she proving to be a female. She having arranged to marry your Mr. Hayden when they get a small pile together, should be glad if you would tell her she may have rifles, etc., from me as a present, I having looted them honestly as per your instructions.

"Sir, I have the honor to be

"Yours truly,

"O. Kettle (Master, retired).

"H. E. the British Resident."

CHAPTER II.

THE CARTHAGINIAN STATE RESERVE.

By what particular process North Africa ejected Captain Kettle on to her shores at Tunis, the present writer has never been able to discover. He arrived by the afternoon train from Kairouan, which, as usual, gasped in an hour behind scheduled time. He traveled in a third-class carriage, which is in itself a finger mark to destitution in a European, and he was utterly divorced from luggage.

He was neat, of course, and clean, but his white drill clothes bore the marks of many careful mendings, and though his white canvas shoes were carefully pipeclayed, they were frayed in places even past his skillful repairing. But his fierce little eye was as bright as ever, and his red torpedo beard was trimmed to its usual miracle of smartness.

He carried the appearance of a man newly returned from one of the Sahara caravan routes, where the day's ration of food is one handful of dates, and the water is scarce, and bitter, and alkaline. His waist was bound by the broad sash worn by camel drivers. His face was browned by out-

rageous suns. He was never a man who carried much flesh, but just then he was thinner than ever, and it seemed easy to read that it was the desiccating air of deserts which had left this mark upon him. But, as I say, that is only guesswork. Where he had been, what wild work he had been up to, are points carefully locked away, and no country is more competent than that part of North Africa between Lake Chad and the salt chotts south of Tunis to keep such secrets inviolate.

The city was plainly foreign to him, and for the moment almost alarming. He stepped out of the station precincts and narrowly escaped being run down by a jangling tram-car; French seemed the only language on exchange; and though there were dark faces and Arab draperies here and there, they had no air of being native to the streets. Electric arc lamps grizzled and glared overhead; and before the café affected by the soldier officers, a band played to an audience in uniform or rice-powder.

It was summer time, and after the tourist season; the crowds outside the cafés were almost entirely Latins; but there was one couple of sweating ship's officers there representing Great Britain, and these spotted him as a fellow countryman, and stared at him curiously, though with hospitality plainly lighting in their eyes.

But Kettle was in no mood for companionship then. He thirsted for whiskey, for good Christian whiskey with soda water, and (if Allah was very kind) ice. He had the aching thirst of the desert in the back of his throat, and the lust for a good hard smoke at a black cigar consumed him. But in his present state these things could only be given in charity, and he was not a man to take favors from anybody. He earned, or, at a pinch, might take; he would never beg.

He walked on to the French town, and passed through the Bab e Behira. A supercilious camel swung aside to give him passage. The smells of native Tunis came out warm and sour to greet him. He counted up the narrow streets which ran into the open space behind the gate like the sticks of a fan, picked out the one he wanted, and went along it at the increased pace of a man nearing a destination after long travel. He went up and up the steep cobbled lanes among the varying smells, past droning native cafés, and at last walked under the dark lid of a closed, unlit bazaar. Here for a moment he hesitated about his way, and asked a direction from a fez-capped nigger boy.

His knowledge of colloquial Arabic was enough to make an eye-glassed Frenchman who was passing turn and stare.

"*Espion Anglais,*" this person muttered to himself, and pulled at a ridiculous beard that sprouted from the two corners of his chin. "The man's a Touareg he's asking for. Why should he want to meet with a Touareg here in Tunis? *Espion Anglais!* I will give information."

Now the eye-glassed man happened to be a journalist, and here was copy *au moins,* a scarce commodity in that hot, limp colony of Tunis. One would have thought that the English spy scare was a trifle overdone in North Africa, but at least it must be admitted that the journalist knew his business in a certain degree—seeing that he drew a livelihood from it. And anyway newspapers must be filled, and hard fact runs short sometimes, as even London and New York will admit.

Captain Kettle, however, went on his way through the narrow alleys unconscious of the attention he had received. He got out of these at length, and came upon a white dusty road leading toward the hospital and the outer walls, and lit bright by a luxurious African moon. Again it was evident that he guided himself by minute directions, well instilled. He wound unhesitatingly along his way, and presently stopped with confidence before a house.

According to Western ideas it was not an hos-

pitable looking place. It presented to the passer-by a broad white slab of wall, level topped, and broken only by a door, which was small, low, and iron studded, after the style of a mediæval castle. Kettle rapped upon it smartly with his knuckles, and, when this brought no response, set to pounding with the side of his shut fist. The house inside reverberated like a muffled drum. A man came presently to that summons, and after some scrapings of bolts the door swung inward. The man stood out in the moonlight, a dandified figure in red fez and mouse-colored haik, and the first words he had ready for his lips were clearly not those of civility. But at the sight of a European—and such a truculent looking little European—he kept these back. "What does monsieur want?" he asked. "It is late for monsieur to be in this part of the city."

"Are you Mohammed Shabash?"

"I am sometimes called by that name."

"Then I have a message for you from your brother."

"Monsieur must have mistaken the name, or the house. I have no brother that monsieur can have met."

"Grant me patience! Do you think I've come all this way, and found the house, and found you, without knowing what I was about? Ali Akkerim is

your brother's name, and I suppose you don't want me to shout it for all the street to hear? No? Then, by James, don't you keep me standing here like a cat on a doorstep any longer."

Kettle stepped inside, and the iron-knobbed door swung into place behind him, and was once more securely barred. The inside of the house was full of close heat, and the air was loaded with the heavy sweetness of attars. The house also gave up from its unseen recesses the silky rustle of garments; but Kettle affected to be deaf to these; he was well instructed in Moslem domestic etiquette by this time.

Mohammed led into the small cloistered courtyard at the back, in which was the usual orange tree hung with yellow fruit. There was a divan there in the moonlight under one of the arches, and Kettle noted as he stripped off his shoes, and sat among the cushions, that it was still warm from the impress of former occupants. He had evidently disturbed Mohammed Shabash from an evening's dalliance in the bosom of his family.

A low table in front of the divan held a jug of tepid syrup and a dish of cloying sweetmeats. "Will you be satisfied?" said Mohammed Shabash with the usual formal hospitality.

"Thank you," said Kettle. "I've got a regular rasping hunger on me, and dessert will do for dun-

nage. But I wish I'd looked in before you sent away the joint. Where I come from lately they've got slim notions of what's a grown man's meal, and when you and I make our pile, my buck, out of what I've got to tell you, one of the first things I do after cabling home some cash to the Missis and the girls, is to have a skinful of solid beef and ale."

The master of the house stifled a yawn. "So you have been out there in the desert, have you, with the Touareg? They are savage peoples there. I have no interest for them!"

"You were born a Touareg, anyway."

"It cannot be denied. But fortunately I was taken in a razzia when a child, and brought here as an employé."

"As a slave, Ali said."

"The same thing. My master was an embroiderer, and I was brought up in the Souk e Sevadjin. I was lucky. My master had no sons, and in time the business came to me. I am enlightened. I have been to your Earl's Court for an exhibit, and also in Chicago. Oh, I am quite up to date. I do not work now. Others work for me, and in the tourist season I import embroideries direct from Hamburg and Bradford. Then I fray out a little thread here, dash in a little stain there, and you have the genuine antique which the tourists demand."

"I know the style."

"Then you must see, mister, how much you damage me by calling me a Touareg. I am no dam' savage. I am mos' civilize."

"You seem a queer nut anyway. You'd make that swashbuckling old Ali lift his eyebrows. But I don't like you any the worse for being a business man. It's a rare soft thing Ali and I are putting you on to, but it will cost a bit of think if we're going to pick out the plums for ourselves, and not have some French officials stepping in to find pensions that will take them home again. I say, did they keep this flat ginger pop on tap for you at Earl's Court?"

"No, mister. Whiskey soda. You like some? Of course." Mohammed Shabash clapped his hands and called out an order in his own tongue.

Kettle interposed hurriedly. "Excuse me, Mohammed, but don't bring out the ladies on my account. I am not asking you to do that amount of violence to your religious persuasion. A good square drink of the forbidden liquid will be quite enough."

"Oh, it is nothing. I am not prejudice. I am quite civilize. I will show you my women. I show them to the tourist on the quiet since my return from Chicago, and for money, you understand.

But to you I will show them for nix. And I will join you in the whiskey and syphon. I drink it frequent. It is only accident you find that pigwash there instead. But we will not send it away. It will do for the women. I have fine women, fat and pleasant. You will not think of me as once a poor savage Touareg when you see my women."

"Well," said Kettle, "just as you like. I'm always ready to do the sociable when required. I see you've got an accordion down there. That's my favorite instrument, and there's many say that I'm no fool of a performer."

"I am most gratify."

"But I can't sing on an empty stomach. Did you say supper was coming on soon?"

"I will see what we can get, and I feel sure you will then play to us dance music, and my new wife shall step for us."

"I will even play for you dance music," said Kettle, with a sigh, "though, for reasons you would not appreciate, those tunes are very repugnant to me."

"What reasons? I like to learn."

"I am a stanch member of the Wharfedale Particular Methodists, and in a way was their founder, and we look upon dancing as only one degree short of blasphemy. Come now, Mohammed, you are evidently not much up on the Prophet just now. What

do you say if you join our community? I could let you have all the points where we differ in a couple of days."

But if Mohammed was a lax follower of his own creed, he was not taking any conversion just then, however civilized such a performance might be, and he said so with a shudder, and some unnecessary warmth. It is probable that Captain Kettle would have flared up at having his offer on so tender a matter flung in his teeth; but at that precise moment a flabby eunuch brought in a row of old kybobs on a skewer, and Kettle was only mortal. He took the meat and held his tongue. To tell the truth the little sailor was near upon starving. Meat he had not touched for a month, and for the previous thirty hours not even so much as a date had come to his lips.

With these cold grilled lumps of mutton, however, inside him, and with a second good stiff whiskey and soda to keep them company, he was a different man. Three giggling, portly Tunisian women slopped in, with their toes tucked into varnished blue patent leather slippers four sizes too small for them, and two of them slouched on to the divan. The third stood before them panting expectantly. Captain Kettle, with a smothered groan, broke off from the hymn tune he was playing with such pleasant

reminiscence, and squeezed out a profane jig with the full force of his instrument. He keenly felt the degradation of having to play such music for such an audience; but the needs of those at home held him by the heartstrings, and all depended on keeping this queer Mohammed Shabash in a reasonable temper.

The stout lady shuffled her absurd slippers, and swayed her body without any reference at all to the music, and her adoring husband was openly proud and delighted at her performance. The moonbeams threw a shadow of the dancer which wriggled like a grotesque toad on the flagstones of the court-yard.

But exhaustion and the climate at length stopped the performance, and presently at a sign from their lord the ladies withdrew. Then Captain Kettle thought that the time had come to broach his business. "You have heard," he said, "of the treasury of Carthage?"

"Who has not? It has been looked for these five thousand years. First by the Romans, then by the Arabs and the other conquerors, now by these French. The French say they dig for archæology; but it is not; they are hunting for treasury also. Still, there is no result. I do not believe there ever was a treasury; or if there was, it was emptied long

before. I tell you I believe very little, mister. I am very civilize."

"Don't you be too knowing. Your brother Ali has learnt for an absolute fact that the thing was there. One of his mullahs found a whole account of it written out on some adobe bricks among one of those musty old ruins that lie peppered about the back country there."

"But still it may have been emptied. And, besides, who is to say where it is?"

"You don't seem very keen on putting together a pile in spite of your civilization. I've got a sketch plan here in my pocket. Three days' labor will prove whether the place is full or empty."

Mohammed Shabash stretched out his thin yellow fingers. "Mister, let me see."

Captain Kettle winked a knowing eye. "Better know where we stand first, my buck. This isn't all your pie. I've got a finger in it, and when my finger's in a pie, a large slice of it's got to be mine, or somebody will buy trouble."

Mohammed Shabash burst out into a querulous whine. "I declare to Allah I am a poor man. I demand that you give to me that which was sent by my brother Ali, my dear brother who lives free in the beyond, the only brother I have got."

"H'm! You weren't very up on the relationship

five minutes ago. But there's no use trying that game on with me. Ali doesn't value you to the extent of a date stone. He told me so. He's sent you messages, and you've ignored them every time. He's not the man to forget a trifle like that. He gave me free leave to make use of you, or ignore you, exactly as I pleased, and I just come to you as being the only capitalist here in Tunis that I've got the name of. For myself," the little man added simply, "I've got my pockets full of fists just now, and it was a case of share or starve."

"How much do you want for your share? I will allow ten per cent."

"I will take just one-half, my buck embroiderer, on the one condition that you finance me through till we either grab the treasury, or make up our minds it isn't there."

Mohammed Shabash squatted back on his heels and raised a storm of expostulation. He was one of the smartest salesmen in the Souk e Sevadjin, and it stood to his honor not to accept an offer without haggling for a better bargain. But Captain Kettle sat placidly among the cushions of the divan and smoked without an attempt to abate his terms. "It's no use you trying your bazaar games on me," he said finally. "I know you aren't half ruined, and I've seen for myself that your family is in no im-

mediate danger of starvation. My folks are, and they're the people I think of first. But blow off your steam if you find it a comfort."

It was late that night before the Touareg-Tunisian finally agreed to terms, and when Kettle said his prayers before turning in on the sleeping-mat, he gave thanks for victory over the infidel, and put up a petition for his subsequent conversion. "I prevailed over Ali, O Lord, to hear me at least with patience, and Ali has a hundred times more man in him to the square inch. Grant therefore, O Lord, that I gather this thing also into the fold."

But in the morning an unexpected trouble arose. Mohammed Shabash returned from the street of the embroiderers in a state of combined fury and fright. "What is this you have done to me?" he cried, with a gesture. "They say you are an English spy. The papers are full of it. They say you were inquiring last night in the Souk el Attarin for some one who was a Touareg, though in Allah's mercy the fools have not caught the name. Soldiers are in the bazaars asking who are Touaregs that the houses of all of them may be searched."

"Pff! Spy be hanged. I am no spy."

"That is no argument. They say you are: that is where the trouble lies. And if you are found here, there will be suspect for me."

"By James! if any of their silly red-legged soldiers come messing around me there will be trouble. By James, Mohammed, do they think because I'm new in from the back country I haven't got a gun? Why standing here in this half-window across the courtyard, even if they do smash in the door, I could drop every son of a dog that tries a rush before he gets through the archway. Don't you be afraid, my buck; your house shan't be raided while I'm in it."

Mohammed Shabash wrung his hands and danced in his absurd slippers. "You must not. It is strickly forbid to shoot or otherwise impede the soldiers. Besides, I am mos' civilize. I cannot afford to have my business disturbed by an *émeute*."

"Then do you call off your red-legged pioupious."

"I cannot. You do not understand. There is great excitement always about spies. The Government approves. It promotes loyalty. Look, mister. I give you two choices; either you must go from my house and surrender, or you must go to my hide place. There is hurry to decide; they will be here presently in search."

The little sailor strongly objected to being harried by the officials of foreign Powers, and so it was considerably against his will he consented to seek

seclusion; but Mohammed in his ecstasy of fright swore that if he resisted further, the whole story of the Carthaginian hoard should be made public. So the well-bucket in the courtyard was lowered a couple of yards and made fast; Kettle slid down to it by the rope, passing with difficulty through the upper aperture; but once under the coping-stone saw an opening in the wall, which, with a vigorous swing, he managed to reach. Here were sundry illicit stores, and among them he took his seat.

Once free of him the well-bucket whirred down the shaft and plunged into the water at its foot, and not five minutes afterward the genuineness of the scare was guaranteed very plainly. Rifle butts pounded against the iron-studded door in the white-washed wall, and when it was obsequiously opened, in rushed a squad of soldiery who spread about the house with ruthless industry.

With them was an eye-glassed French journalist with an absurd beard, busily taking notes. With them also was Mohammed Shabash, wailing at the damage done in one breath, cursing at the indignity shown to his women in the next, and at the end of each bar, blatantly protesting his unshakable loyalty to the mighty Government of France. And underneath in his dusty niche was Captain Owen Kettle fingering a revolver, and viciously wishing he could

come across the individual who had arranged all this upheaval for his benefit.

But once the authorities had gone, there at the well-mouth appeared Mohammed Shabash as an eager ally. "Come up, mister. They have gone and will return no more. You are English, and the English I do not like. But I hate the French. I wish you were spy."

"If you hint at that again, my buck, I'll wring your dusky neck."

"I do not care. You are English, and I wish to give pain to French. There has come to my hand a plan of the Bizerta fortifications and all the cannons. I will give it to you, and so revenge will come to me, and my honor will be save."

"Anything to oblige," said the little sailor; "hand 'em over. But now let's get to business again."

By what devious methods Captain Owen Kettle was smuggled out of the city of Tunis and lodged in the stable of a well-camel at Marsa need not be here recounted in detail, as many excellent people in the bazaars would be thereby implicated. The spy craze was still running cheerily; in military circles there was abundant activity; and the journalist with the ridiculous beard had made himself so conspicuous, that a full description of his person had

come to Captain Kettle, which that peppery little man had stored for future reference.

A night expedition from La Marsa up to the hill beside Cardinal Lavigerie's ugly white stucco cathedral came to Kettle as a surprise. He had expected to look down on the ruins of a vast city, bristling with walls and populous with broken columns. Algeria and Tunisia are thick with these, and there are many in the deserts beyond. But when instead his eye met ploughed fields and barren headlands he thought of the intricate plan in his pocket, and felt the taste of something very much like defeat.

But he was no man to accept a reverse from the first blow. He made his way down the steep hillsides and found that the clear African moonlight from above had not shown him everything. Here and there were pits dug in the ground or galleries driven into the slopes. He explored one and got an idea; explored a couple more and established a certainty.

Carthage still existed underground, and out of sight of the sun. Carthage had been partly tapped by latter-day archæologists, and probably mapped by them. When he came to think of it, this would be within Ali Akkerim's knowledge, seeing that that worthy brigand had received his reports from the place quite recently. The only trouble was, had the

treasure been disturbed and carried away surreptitiously? That could only be found out by experiment.

He returned to Marsa, sent word of his need to Mohammed Shabash, and in a week had a copy of the French archæologists' charts of the ancient Phœnician and Roman cities of Carthage. The charts had been difficult to procure; the spy mania still buzzed; and Captain Kettle was prayed to observe the most exquisite caution.

He pored over the plans, and soon found the points he wished for. The sketch of Ali Akkerim tallied in every particular. It was a great feather in the cap of the French archæologists—if only they could have known. Then, armed with pick and shovel, with provender and wine for a week, he set off one night to commence work.

The moon had worn itself out, and the night was conveniently dark; and Captain Kettle stepped out upon his way, with an elated feeling that fortune was near to him. He had visions of chests of gems, of great stacks of gold and silver built up in portly crossbars; and always behind them he pictured Mrs. Kettle and her daughters, dressed in silks of the finest, and being looked up to as people of fortune by all the chapel circle.

He went up over the hill past the Roman amphi-

theatre, and down the steep slopes of the other side. He hit the road, and held along it for some time. Then, after finding his marks, he struck off toward the seaward side, and presently stepped down the inclined way which led to some abandoned excavations. Fortune and the French had been kind to him. Modern diggers had burrowed underground close to this very treasury; they had created a whole labyrinth of tunnelings; but by some marvelous luck they had halted conveniently short of the prize.

In the meanwhile M. Max Camille, journalist, of the city of Tunis, was a man with vanishing credit. He had cried *Espion Anglais!* and had received much pleasant applause; several quite unlikely people had been arrested, and certain troops of the Republic saw more of the *vie intime* of native Tunis than falls to their general lot. On a very slender foundation of fact, M. Max Camille had built a very considerable superstructure round the person and the projects of this spy, and, having some acquaintance with another of the arts, had knocked off a very creditable sketch of the little Englishman, which was duly reproduced in his paper. But when after abundant search this same pernicious person was not forthcoming, and no one in Tunis in the least recollected to have seen him, then certain officers, under the irritation of Tunisian summer heat, called M.

Camille not journalist, but liar, with the usual consequences.

A couple of harmless but soothing duels cleared the air somewhat. But in spite of his ridiculous beard M. Max Camille was no fool. He saw that his journalistic credit was ragged. It galled him to remember that he had been a *fruit sec* at home, and he was determined to mend matters, if energy could do that same. The fierce looking little Englishman had been in the Souk el Attarin, there was no doubt about that; and though his business as spy had only been guessed at in the first instance, this disappearance, in M. Camille's mind, went far toward proving it. All train and steamer exits had been watched. The man could not have got far away. It remained then to find this English spy, and cover himself with glory.

Money for bribes he had not got, but a North African journalist is not over scrupulous, and M. Camille had ways of putting the screw on some of the denizens of the bazaars which would not look well if bluntly set forth on paper. In two days he materialized Kettle into something more solid than a rumor. On the third day he learned that the man had gone to Marsa. On the fourth day he ran him to earth in the reeking camel stable aforesaid.

M. Camille said nothing about his find. He had

been accused of turning up a mare's nest once. This time he would catch his man red-handed in his espionage before capturing and exposing him. The camel (of the stable) was employed during day hours in rotating a water-whim on an adjacent housetop, and in this dwelling M. Max Camille found quarters. He watched all Captain Kettle's movements with a jealous eye, and when under cover of night the little sailor went abroad, the journalist with stealthy footsteps and handy weapon invariably followed him.

He could not quite make out why this spy should make for the site of vanished Carthage. No fortifications lay thereabouts. But because the thing was not understandable, that did not make it any the less suspicious, and M. Camille followed with an eager mind, and figured to himself Max Camille, the journalist, driving before him at pistol's mouth this accursed British spy whom all the troops of Tunis had failed to capture. It was a luscious picture.

Arrived then that last night of Kettle's stay in Marsa, when he took spade, pick and stores, and made for the burrow. M. Camille followed faithfully in the shadow behind. The Englishman walked quickly, treading the way with the assured gait of one who has very definite notions about his

destination. He entered the mouth of one of the excavations, halted a moment inside to light a candle, and then held confidently on.

There were no superfluous tremors about M. Camille. He pulled a revolver from his pocket, held it ready, and stepped on softly in the other's wake.

The galleries twisted and turned; climbed up and then down; and grew high or crouched low with maddening uncertainty. The light of the candle ahead waxed and waned. The stuffy heat of the place was enough to choke one. But on and on the leader held his way, and with grim persistency M. Camille followed.

Then of a sudden, what was that? The candle stood by itself on the floor. He held ready his weapon. How could this perfidious——

A strong grip seized him by the collar, and a ring of cold metal was rammed into the back of his head. A voice said in French: "Drop that gun, you sacred pig, or I'll blow your back hair out through your whiskers!"

It is scarcely to M. Max Camille's discredit that he threw down his weapon as though it burned him. There is something very persuasive in a revolver muzzle suddenly screwed into the nape of one's neck by a man with such a commanding voice as Captain Kettle's.

"Now march to the other side of that candle, and turn round to let's have a look at you. See you don't knock over the light, or I'll put some lead in you just as a safeguard."

M. Camille did as he was bidden.

"By James, the man with eyeglasses and the ridiculous beard. So it was you, you figure of fun, that set this spy-hunt on my heels, eh? Answer me."

M. Camille saw no reason to accuse himself unjustly. "I met monsieur in the Souk el Attarin, and monsieur asked to be directed to the house of a Touareg, surely a suspicious request in Tunis, seeing that the Touaregs are always making war on France. *Enfin,* the rumor seems to have been built up on that."

"I see. Modest of you. Bazaars have ears, but we don't say whose feet they walk about on. Well, my lad, you've poked your nose in where you are not wanted, and now you'll just have to stay till it's convenient to let you go."

"I'm afraid I do not exactly understand."

"My French," said Kettle grimly, "may not be first chop, but if you force me to start handling you, I'll guarantee you don't complain that I fail to make my meaning clear then. I'm here, my man, to dig up part of Carthage. I don't know whether you've

done any navvying before, but I guarantee you'll be tolerably expert before I've done with you."

"But I don't agree——"

"I don't ask you to. But presently you'll be requested to work, and if you fail to do your whack, I shall argue with you in a style that will probably surprise your nerves."

It is better perhaps to pass lightly over the painful apprenticeship which M. Max had to serve before he became thoroughly acquainted with Captain Kettle's methods, and thought it best to submit to them. He resisted vehemently at first, and was belabored with the haft of a shovel till he saw fit to delve. He tried to pass over his taskmaster when they desisted from labor, and supped, and lay down to rest, being deceived by the little man's snores; but promptly discovered that he slept weasel-like with one eye on watch. And there were other episodes.

But presently, when they settled down, there grew up between the two of them an understanding of one another's qualities which amounted almost to respect. Their hands were chafed to rawness on pick and shovel as they labored to dig through the deposits of the ages, and the dust and the stuffy heat kept them in a state of approaching strangulation. The *débris* they dug from their pit they stored in the

galleries behind them, so that every basketful tended to constrict the already narrow air space. But Kettle, in a moment of expansion, had let out the secret of his quest, and had promised M. Camille a handsome present out of his abundance when it came to him, and the journalist, who was naturally a fellow of fine imagination, brightened the toil with brilliant pictures of the hoard which lay so close to them.

At intervals came Mohammed Shabash or one of his emissaries bearing provisions. Mohammed was mad with excitement at the thought of making his fortune, and very frightened lest there should be trouble with the French Government about realizing. As Mohammed kept repeating, he was "mos' civilize."

But with Mohammed Shabash, Kettle could not make a friendship. Kettle had liked the savage Ali; but the more polished product of Earl's Court and Chicago had something so kickable in his nature that he bitterly repented that even hunger should have forced him into a partnership with such a creature.

And in the meanwhile the work went on. Pick, pick, pick into caked ground that was almost as hard as virgin rock, and then scrape, scrape with the shovel at the dusty fragments so hardly won. Clay

they threw out, and scraps of stone, and fragments of figured brick, and clots of tesselated pavement. M. Camille compared himself to a troglodyte, and mapped out a plan for an underground café chantant in a palace of original Carthage. Captain Kettle pictured to himself what hell must be really like, both for climate and situation, and stored up in his memory notes for a sermon on the subject when once more he got back to the pulpit of his chapel in Wharfedale.

Never once did the little sailor's faith in Ali Akkerim's instructions fail. "The top half of what it said is correct," he would repeat, "as we've seen for ourselves. The archæological chaps have rooted up the buildings round the treasury just as the plan marks them. And if we go on long enough we shall come to the bottom of the street where the door is. But by James! talk of dynamite. This dried mud is hard enough to chip bits off dynamite!"

Their constant labor, however, at last met with its reward. They bottomed their shaft and came upon a cobbled pavement. Another half day's work, and they cleared the wall of the treasury itself, a wall built of stone in massive blocks. Camille, full of haste now, was for attacking it forthwith, and quarrying a passage to the glittering wealth within. Kettle, more practical, showed that the polished

granite was almost as hard as their pick, and that it was as likely as not a dozen feet in thickness. A doorway lay further on down the street. They must burrow a way to it.

They did this, with infinite pain and weariness, coming upon layers of charred wood now, compressed to the hardness of coal, and in the end were confronted with the door itself, a massive structure of bronze.

Here at any rate there appeared a check. But to their surprise the metal had so perished under the ages that they were quickly able to batter a passage. They scrambled with one another to be first through the opening. They found themselves in a vast chamber, pillared and vaulted. In it were stored red earthenware jars, each of the bigness of a man. The candles, burning with feebleness in the foul air, showed the place but dimly.

Each peered into the jars nearest to him. They were empty except for a little dust. They ran along the rows, searching, searching, and found always dust, but never metal, never gems.

Kettle threw over one of the jars, and it fell and splintered. "Just my luck. The place has been looted already."

M. Max Camille, the man of superficial reading, leaned down and fingered the dust. "I don't think

so," he said slowly. "No, look there. That's a grain of corn. Ah, it has crumbled. But there's another. And look, another. Monsieur, we are in the Treasury of Carthage, and those jars contained the treasure, which has never been tampered with from the day it was stored till we arrived. The only error we made was to imagine that the State reserve would be coin or jewels. Naturally it would be corn. But I am afraid what is left would fetch little in the cereal market to-day."

"Just my luck," said Kettle. "Here, let's get out of this."

They climbed to the surface again and sat down on the ground facing the sea.

Kettle snuffed luxuriously at the incoming sea-breeze. "Good smell, hasn't it, after you've been away from it for long? It's a decent old puddle."

The Frenchman shrugged. "Each to his taste. For myself I always associate the sea with ships, and ships with purgatory—— May I take it that monsieur has now dispensed with my services?"

"Yes, you may go when you please. You don't get the bit of a plum I promised you, and I am sorry. You worked like a man. But I don't advise you to start off on that spy racket again, with me as a subject."

M. Camille laughed. "Monsieur has cured me of any desire in that direction. Monsieur is such a *risque tout.* But for this latter performance I should counsel a quiet tongue. It is strictly forbid to dig unauthorized among the ruins. And I am equally involved with monsieur."

"I'm not likely to brag about it. Besides, I shall be off to sea again presently. That's my proper place. I don't seem to turn up successes on shore anyway."

"Of course there is monsieur's partner, a native, I understand. It would be very inconvenient to me if he talked about the matter."

"Yes, I'd forgotten him. Well, we'll tell him we resign all claim to the loot, and let him come and look at it for himself and get his own share of the disappointment. He's a man who's earned my dislike. But as for talking, you needn't be afraid. He's far too careful of his own skin."

"Then good-by, monsieur. I am glad that you have forgiven that little misunderstanding about the spy trouble."

Captain Kettle winked. "That's all right," he said. "I've had my score against that already. Look, here's a draft of the letter which I forwarded under the cover of one to my wife."

He pulled a paper from his pocketbook, and lit a match. This is what M. Camille read:

"To the General Manager,
"War Dept., Govt. Offices,
"London, Eng.

"Sir—Inclosed please find plan of forts, harbors, etc., at Bizerta. Have come across these here, and am sending them because French took me for a spy, which I am not. If they had not worried me should not have sent them. I understand your Intelligence Dept. is very inferior, so these will probably come as news to you. I am not asking for any pay, for, although a poor man, I have my pride. But, if there is any pay going, you might send it to Wharfedale Particular Methodist Chapel, Craggetts, via Skipton-in-Craven, for general maintenance account.

"Yours truly,
"O. Kettle (Master)."

"Sacred blue!" said M. Max Camille.

CHAPTER III.

THE TAIL-SHAFT.

It speaks volumes for Captain Kettle's destitute and desperate condition that he should have accepted such a position at all. Indeed, to his peculiarly masterful mind, the degradation of it was more apparent than it would have been to a weaker man. But he had no choice. Walpole, the agent, was brutally frank upon the matter.

"My dear Captain," he said, "if you want the billet you must swallow the conditions. It's no particle of use your trying to stand on your dignity, and if you still intend to I must ask you to do it outside this office. I'm only an agent in the matter, and I've been bullied down the cable by the owners till the worry of it's brought on my old fever again. A white Englishman isn't intended by nature to be badgered to this extent during the summer months in Tunis."

"I'm sure I feel for you, sir," said the little sailor. "I know from my own experience that steamship owners can be very trying sometimes."

"Well, we won't discuss that, Captain. The question is, are you going out as skipper of this *Ash-*

ville, or am I to wire around the Algerian ports to pick up some other man who holds a master's ticket? You must not think I'm cornered because just for the moment you're the only available skipper in Tunis. The boat is losing money, of course, by staying in harbor here, with her wages and grub bills, and all her other expenses running up, and I pressed that point forward, and only got snubbed for my pains. I'm to get a skipper who will consent to act under the mate, and if time is lost in finding such a man, it is no concern of mine. The owners seem to know what they are doing. I guess they've a notion they can trust the mate, and I don't blame them. You know as well as I do, Captain, the sort of pirate an out-of-a-job skipper at a place like Tunis generally is. It's seldom he's over-brimming with excellences."

Poor Kettle flushed painfully under the tan. "They're a set of drunken brutes for the most part, sir."

"No offence to you, Captain, of course, though I was told pointedly of one or two little games you've been up to since you've been in this colony, and I must say you've got a gallows-bad reputation among the French here."

"I think it's an Englishman's duty, sir, to keep his end up with foreigners wherever he may be."

"Yes," said Walpole ambiguously. "I fancy you're just the type of man that keeps up our dear country's reputation. Come now, Captain, about this *Ashville?*"

Kettle stared round the bare whitewashed walls of the office, and moved uneasily in his chair. "I suppose there's something wrong with the mate, too, or they'd have given him command, as they seem so fond of him? It's the usual thing, too, to promote the mate."

"Kelly, the mate, hasn't a master's certificate, and I should have thought you might have guessed that." Mr. Walpole fanned himself with a palm leaf, and spoke with growing irritation. "The late skipper came in here mad drunk, steamed his old packet up full speed across the lake, nearly washed away the walls of the dredged-out fairway, sank a lighter, and would have run down the quay, if only they hadn't mutinied in the engine-room and stopped her way for him."

"Well, I will say a man like that deserves to be fired."

"Oh, the owners weren't vindictive. They'd have taken Captain Carmichael on again. I had instructions to pay all fines and damages, and get him off to sea again as soon as possible. But I will give the French credit for knowing how to tackle a case like

that. They know a bad man when they see one, and they keep a man of Carmichael's sort safe in jail. They gave him three years. It doesn't matter a sou to them how long the steamboat is tied up here eating her head off. They just won't give any clearance papers till they see there's a man on board holding a master's ticket."

"No, for that matter you must carry a man with a full certificate if the insurance policy isn't to be voided. The underwriters see to that."

Mr. Walpole started slightly. Was this little sailor hinting at something? Well, he was going to indulge in no confidence with a waif from a Tunisian slum. He tapped the writing table sharply with his fan. "Come, now, Captain, I'm a busy man, and we've wasted more than enough time already. The wages are £14 a month. Do you accept?"

"Yes, sir."

"And it's under the distinct understanding that you are under Kelly's orders."

"I give you my word for that, sir."

"I'm glad to have it. Not that it matters particularly. As you will find for yourself, Captain, Mr. Kelly is a big lump of a fellow, who could put you in his waistcoat pocket if you turned up awkward with him."

"I'd love to see him try it," said Kettle unpleasantly. "I'd like you to understand, sir, that I've tackled some of the ugliest toughs that ever carried a shut fist in my time, and size isn't a thing I take into account. If Mr. Kelly treats me respectfully, he'll find no officer more easy to get on with. But, by James, if he tries any handling games on me, he'll find his skipper a holy earthquake."

"*Ts ts,*" said Walpole, half to himself, "that's just the character I heard about you. Confound it, man, why do you want to take offence where none was intended? I only wanted to give you a civil hint. I'm sure that if you only do your duty quietly, you'll find Kelly quite pleasant and easy to get on with, and you'll have as nice a run out to Brazil as a man could wish for. The only thing I know wrong about Kelly is that he's half mad on the subject of some patent medicine, Kopke's-something-Cure it is, and rams its virtue down your throat on every possible occasion."

"I know my duty as shipmaster, and I do it exactly."

The agent tapped Kettle gently on the knee with his palm-leaf fan. "The great thing for a shipmaster to do is to find out his owners' wishes, and carry them through. If he does that, he gets extra pay, and perquisites, and promotion."

The agent clearly wished to convey some hint. But Captain Kettle refused to unbend. "I have been accustomed, sir, to have my owners' instructions given to me direct, either verbally or in writing. Of course, away from home an agent stands for the owner. If you have anything to say to me, sir, it shall have my best attention."

Mr. Walpole slammed his fan down on to the writing desk and took up a pen. "I have nothing further to add, Captain. If you will permit me to say so, you are a complete stranger to me, and your manner since you came into this office has not been such as to invite superfluous confidences."

Captain Kettle stood sharply to his feet, and swung on his cap. "I bid you good morning," he said, and walked out.

For a minute he stood there and hesitated, and his eye traveled over the new white French buildings which lined the street. The sight of them sickened him. Out beyond the town walls was a hill, irregular with the quaint monuments of a Moslem cemetery, and beyond again, under the aching blue of the sky, was Africa, full of a million possibilities.

There never was such a climate as that of Africa for breeding schemes full of the most brilliant promise. During his recent residences, both in French Tunis and in the native city above, he had been of-

fered partnership in ten such schemes for every day. He had dabbled in several till he had arrived at the point which proved them barren. But to make money out of any of them was beyond the power of sorcery. How he had lived even on their meagre proceeds was a mystery.

Just then, too, money was for him a crying necessity. A mortgage pressed like some horrid incubus on the farm in Wharfedale, and the interest was long in arrears. It was only by courtesy that his wife and daughters had not been long since evicted. If it had not been for that, he would have tried again at some of these African ventures. But the risk of them was too great. From this steamer berth he could touch his advance wages at once, and these, if sent to England, would tide over present difficulties. It was only his pride and his own tastes which stood in the way. He cursed these sharply, and strode off down the tramway lines toward the coal dust and the quays.

The *Ashville* lay stern-on to the concrete wall, and a gang plank with a flimsy life-line gave passage over her counter. The little sailor stepped briskly up, and stood for a minute on the poop, looking around him with vast disgust. On the hatch of the main deck below him, under a ragged temporary awning, four deck hands sprawled on the warm tar-

paulins and wrangled drearily over some dirty cards. In the alleyway an engineer in pajamas discoursed music on a mouth-organ. On the bridge-deck above a couple of well-curved hammocks exuded the tobacco smoke of complacent idlers.

Kettle ran down the poop ladder, crossed the main deck, and went up to the chart-house with his quick, springy stride. The chart-house was closed by its wire mosquito door, and from within came heavy labored snores. Captain Kettle stepped inside and beheld in singlet and trousers a man, enormously fat, asleep on the settee. He was packed with pillows almost to the sitting posture, and even with this relief his face was blue, and his breathing stertorous.

The little sailor knew well the symptoms. "H'm," he commented. "You aren't built for this hot climate. And by that blue mug of yours your heart's bad, anyway. I guess waking you will be a kindness."

The sleeper opened his eyes at Kettle's touch, and shuddered flabbily.

"I suppose you're Mr. Kelly, the mate?"

"That's my name and grade." His voice was curiously high and weak.

"I'm Captain Kettle, that's just been appointed here as master in place of Captain Carmichael. I suppose the second mate must have been acting as

mate while you've been temporarily in command, and I must say he's backed you up very badly. The packet's like a hog-pen to look at; some deckhands have got a card party on number four hatch; and a brace of dirty firemen are siestaing in hammocks on the bridge deck."

"I suppose there was nothing further for them to do. We've been in harbor here some time."

"That doesn't matter. By James, what's this second mate—that's been acting mate—made of? By James, doesn't he know enough to make work for the hands, even if there isn't work? I've seen hands turned to at chipping and burnishing chain cable if there was no other way of keeping idleness out of them. It strikes me as being about time that young man stepped back to his proper job again, and had you above him once more as mate, to show him what a mate's duties really are."

The fat man helped himself to a drink of water from the top of the wash-stand, to which he added some drops from a bottle bearing a patent medicine label, and then he turned round with a hand in his breeches pocket.

"I suppose Mr. Walpole, the agent," he said in his high, weak voice, "pointed out to you that the owners wished me to have practically the entire management on board here?"

"He did. But at the same time I was led to understand that, barring that you had the misfortune not to hold a master's ticket, you were perfectly competent for everything else in the way of duty."

"I see. And as it is?"

"As it is, I've seen for myself what sort of discipline you keep. You've no sort of command over your crew. If you wanted any of those hands to do anything, he'd have to wake up first, and then he'd think, and then nine to one he'd refuse."

"Oh," squeaked the fat man. "That's your idea? Well, different people have different ways of carrying on discipline. For myself I don't believe in hazing my hands. When there's work to do I see they do it; but when there isn't, I let them stand easy. I've no use for a burnished anchor or shined-up wire rigging. But when I want a man to do anything, don't you make any error about his doing it. The hands here know me. They take it as an axiom that I always cover them before I give an order."

"That's more than I should do."

"Well, Captain, I'll tell you in confidence that I've no use for a rough-and-tumble. My heart wouldn't stand it. And when you came in here, you looked like war, and so I took the liberty to make ready for you." He nodded down at his trousers pocket, and

by a movement of the hand concealed there, showed the outline of a revolver which kept it company.

"Ah," said Kettle with a shrug, "if you contrived to hit me."

"I'm not without practice, Captain. I had to down one swine in the Bay not ten days ago for refusing duty. Got him in the hip bone in one shot. You can see the patch I've had to put on the cloth where the shot came through. The rest of the crew turned to like lambs when they saw him drop. There's some that clap a pistol to a man's head, there's some that shoot from inside a jacket pocket; but for real daunting effect I believe my way of loosing off from inside your trousers pocket beats anything that's ever been yet invented. They never know when you're laying for them; and as a consequence it smashes their nerve, and they just obey orders like so many school kids."

"Well, Mr. Mate, it appears I've misjudged you somewhat, and I'm open to apologize. Not that I think you could have fetched me with a down-wrist shot like that, before I could have blown daylight into you. I carry my own gun in the old-fashioned, respectable hip pocket, and practice has made me pretty nippy in pulling it. But, Mr. Kelly, I agree with you that yours is a good enough way of getting respect with a crew, and if under those circum-

stances it doesn't hurt your eye to see the old packet look like a hog-pen, I've nothing more to add. There, sir, that's for you, and I may say it's not my habit to apologize like that very frequently."

"I'm sure, Captain, you're treating me handsomely. I've whiskey here. I'll just order steam for you by your leave, and then we'll have a peg, if you don't mind, to our better and more pleasant acquaintance."

If Captain Kettle had taken to a certain extent the measure of the mate, Mr. Kelly had grasped with considerable accuracy the character of Captain Kettle, and formed his behavior accordingly. The crew were turned to at the ordinary affairs of shipboard, and by the time the *Ashville* got her clearance papers and pilot, and cast off from the bollards on Tunis Harbor quay, the click of an iron discipline had spread itself fore and aft. She steamed dead slow down the putrid lake, between the festering walls of dredged-out filth, and reached Goleta and dropped her pilot, and then with the lift of clear green Mediterranean water beneath, drew away from that coast of many histories, and rolled off on her own mysterious errand.

The cabin food was good; the Captain's steward was a man of brain and taste; and when at last he had seen his vessel free of the land, and was able to

go down for supper, Kettle had a second cut at the salt beef, and a third spoonful of the dry hash, and a fourth cup of the black well-boiled tea, and afterward said a new and elegant extempore grace with peculiar unction. It was many a weary month since he had tasted a meal which so entirely tickled his palate.

He was impressed, too, with his moral victory over the mate. He had never had an officer under him more observant of the dignity due to a ship's titular head, and, when it came to the point, he had seldom come across a mate, who, when he chose, could so satisfactorily drive a crew. Every morning the rising sun was greeted with the thump of holystones and the swish of hose and sand. The steamer began to carry with her always the cleanly odor of new-drying paint. So what with this pleasant scent in his nostrils, and the sight of gleaming brasswork and snowy decks, Kettle's senses were lulled with a kind of beatific enjoyment.

Still, with all that, on the rare occasions when the fierce-eyed little man offered to unbend, which even the strictest of ship-masters may do at times to an elderly and competent mate, Mr. Kelly maintained a respectful reserve. Walpole, the agent ashore, had hinted at instructions given by the vessel's owners, first to Captain Carmichael, and then to Kelly,

and Kettle, who was earning the owners' pay, and so was full of loyalty to these owners, had a natural wish to know the trend of their instructions. He hinted and hinted to this effect, but the fat, blue-faced mate would never unbosom himself; and when finally he put his question with blunt openness, he was met with an equally blunt, though respectful refusal.

"My orders, sir," said Kelly, "were given to me in confidence, and you will see for yourself that without further orders, I cannot hand them on."

"Right," said Kettle, and reached for his accordion. "That clears my conscience, and if anything is done on this steamboat against owners' wishes, it's their funeral. My theory is, Mr. Kelly, that when a master's drawing pay, he's bound to carry out the orders of those that are paying him. But if he gets no orders, he just does what he considers right and shipshape. We'll drop the subject now, please, and if you choose you may listen while I give some music."

The *Ashville* called in at Grand Canary and coaled at Las Palmas, and then running south about the island, stood across the greater ocean for Santos in Brazil, her first American port of call. The lips of Kelly, the mate, were more blue than ever, and his neck was thicker, and the veins of his forehead were

more congested. A minute's exertion left him almost breathless. But he stuck to his work with a stolid pluck which Kettle could but admire; and though at times fright at his own condition showed itself plainly in his eye, he never complained.

Kettle, with a sailor's fondness for drugs, had overhauled the ship's medicine chest as one of his first exercises on board, and himself had sampled many of its contents. More than once he had offered a dose to the mate, particularizing the mixture which he felt sure would do him good. But Kelly swore by Kopke's Competent Cure. He had come across it, so he said, in a moment of desperate need; had found from the advertisement that his complaint was one of the many which it made a specialty of curing; and had stuck to it ever since with the most encouraging results.

He was a dull man, the mate. He was a man pressed down by ill-health and the dread of sudden death. But there was one subject he could wax enthusiastic over, and that was the Competent Cure. He could quote the literature supplied with the bottles with fluent accuracy. He was as ardent in finding converts to Kopke as ever Kettle was in collecting adherents to the lonely creed of the Wharfedale Particular Methodist Chapel.

So matters went along, then, on the *Ashville*,

even-gaited as one may say, till Teneriffe, which was the last land of the Canary Islands, had sunk four days beneath the sea, and then the accident occurred which made her voyage memorable. It arrived a bell after the watch had been changed at midnight, and announced its arrival with a crack, a crash, a bump and a jar, a noisy shiver of the vessel's fabric, a wild whirring of engines, all of which were scaring enough, and then a moment's absolute silence, which was the most awe-raising of the whole lot.

Captain Owen Kettle was lying on his bunk in neat pajamas, smoking a moist black Canary cigar, and wrestling with a reluctant rhyme. Three well-turned verses stood to his credit on the writing block in neatly penciled lines. He had the sentiments of the fourth verse securely in his head; it tripped merrily to his favorite tune of "Greenland's Icy Mountains," but it was coy of delivering itself in exact metre. But at the alarm he slipped paper and pencil under the pillow of the bunk, and was outside the chart-house and on to the upper bridge well under five seconds.

Both mate and second mate were there already, the former almost choked with his hurry and his emotions. But to Kettle's trained intelligence there was no need for a special report. The quietude of

the propeller, and a few light clouds of steam billowing up from the engine-room skylight, told him where the trouble had occurred, and the rush of water from somewhere below hinted at its gravity.

"She's by the stern already," gasped Kelly in his high, unnatural falsetto.

"An inch or so. But listen to that squeak. That's one of the engineers screwing down the watertight slide over the shaft tunnel. It'll be a section of shaft that's gone, but whether it's the tail or the intermediate has got to be seen. We shall have a sweet job mending it."

"Mending!" screamed Kelly. "There can be no question of repairs out here. It is out of all reason. Besides, she is settling down already. There is no chance of a tow either. We are out of all steamer tracks. I tell you she is settling down now—look. We must get the boats into the water and desert her before she swamps with us."

Captain Owen Kettle glared at the mate, and swung a hand round to his hip. The mate, with heaving chest, hung on the bridge-rail with one arm, and kept the other gripped on something in his breeches pocket. They were within an ace of some very rapid shooting.

But Kelly was clever enough to appeal to the only plea which could have saved the peace. "You prom-

ised!" ne cried. "The final say of everything connected with this steamboat is to be mine, Captain. You passed your word, and if that's not all canting humbug that you've said about your chapel and your faith, you'll keep it."

Kettle slipped away the threatening hand, and crammed it out of temptation's way in his pajama pocket. "If you are acting just now on owners' instructions," he said pointedly, "you'd better tell me what they are, and I'll help to carry them out. I'm earning owners' pay, and am open to doing what they hire me for."

"I can tell you nothing. I dare tell you nothing. My last word is that the old packet is sinking, and there is no chance to repair her, and no chance of being picked up, and we must leave her in the boats. Ah! here's the chief. You'll see he'll confirm what I've said. There's no chance of repairs out here."

The old chief engineer came up to the bridge and made his report. The tail-shaft had cracked and parted. The engines had raced badly before they could be stopped, but had done themselves no serious damage. No one was hurt, although there had been some narrow escapes. He was blowing off steam now. "A tidy sup of water got into my engine-room before we could get the shaft tunnel cut

off with the slide door," said the chief, with gloomy triumph. "I always said that the worm gear we have for shutting off shaft tunnels worked too slow, and I brought out a patent once for a quicker motion. But none of the firms I offered it to would take it up, and I lost my own bit o' capital by trying to run it myself, and that's why I'm here to-day instead of riding in a motor car of my own on shore. It's a fine satisfaction to me to be able to tell from my own experience——"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Brodie, that's all right. But what I want to know is, can we, in your opinion, repair her?"

"We-e-ll! if it's repairs at sea ye talk of, it would be very difficult——"

"There!" screamed Kelly, "I knew! We are wasting time. She is settling down under us. Captain Kettle, I remind you again of your promise, and bid you order me at once to get out the boats."

Old Brodie permitted himself to deliver a small whistle of surprise.

Kettle felt it due to his honor to explain. "Mr. Brodie, I wish you to understand that the mate is in virtual command, in accordance with an agreement which I made with Mr. Walpole, the agent, in Tunis. That is for your own information, and not

for a court of inquiry, if ever we come to one. I never sailed in such a humiliating position before, and never shall have the chance again if ever we get ashore and this is looked into. The dirty business will cost me my ticket as sure as James. Mr. Kelly, you may get those blasted boats into the water as quick as you jimmy well please."

News of this kind quickly spreads. Out from the forecastle doors trotted deckhands, firemen and trimmers, each with a bag that was swollen with his scanty wardrobe. The officers, whose effects were insured, took care to provide for a new kit by bringing nothing.

The steamer fell off into the trough of a good strong Atlantic swell, and roared steam through the escapes as though her boilers pained her. The men climbed to the top of the fiddley and threw themselves at the boats. They ripped off the awnings, pitched out the falls, cut the gripes, kicked away the chocks, and then packed in their valueless bundles with care and thoughtfulness. Afterward, with a vast amount of getting in one another's way, they set about filling water breakers, and laying hold of victuals.

Except for the cook and the captain's steward, no one in the least seemed to know where anything was stored. The mess-room steward, who might have

helped, had got at the second engineer's whiskey bottle, and had quickly reduced himself to such a state that he could contribute nothing but incoherencies and music. The other two were dazed, had not enough initiative to act without orders, and ran about from place to place, not knowing what to start on first. There was nobody to order, nobody to guide, nobody to drive.

The confusion was amazing, and notwithstanding the fact that there was not the smallest immediate danger of the vessel sinking beneath them, something very like a panic began to grow, and quickly spread. Captain Kettle, the nominal commander, did nothing to check it. He perched himself on a white painted rail of the upper bridge and smoked and waited. He had had his lawful authority rudely plucked from him by the mate, and, in his fierce little mind, it seemed to him only bare justice that the mate should take over the hard part of the command with the soft.

He watched Kelly carry his purple face about from place to place, squeaking, threatening, gasping for breath. The men took small enough notice of him. The other officers, seeing that there was something wrong in his relationship with the Captain, backed him up very half-heartedly, and in consequence there was chaos, which Kettle grimly enough

set down as a compliment paid by justice to himself.

Then panic bit deeper, and one of the lifeboats filled with men, too maddened with their sheep-like scare to think of their utter lack of provisions and the thousand miles between them and the nearest land. They swung the davits outboard and lowered her. Other men leaped on to the tackles and swarmed down into her. Kelly rushed at them, beating furiously at their heads with the stock and trigger guard of his pistol.

"You fools!" he screamed, "you frightened fools! There are plenty of other boats." Then he gurgled, and then breath failed him, and he fell in a slack heap and twitched feebly.

It was at this point that Captain Owen Kettle interfered. He clapped a hand on to the bridge rail, and vaulted lightly over on to the fiddley. He went to the mate's side, and made a quick diagnosis. "Apoplectic," he said, "and any one could have guessed it was coming from the mere look of you. You knew it yourself, and what drugs could do, you did. But I guess you are booked past Kopke this trip. Here you, and you, take the mate down below to his room."

The two men he had spoken to turned with frightened scowls, and showed every inclination of dis-

obeying their Captain's orders. (Kettle, be it remembered, was small to look at, and, so far, on board the *Ashville,* had not shown that he was otherwise than small in either power or ability.) But of a sudden these two men found themselves gripped by two very capable hands, and their heads were knocked violently together, and then furious attacks were made upon them with foot, fist and tongue, till out of sheer terror and pain they picked up poor Kelly, and carried him below as commanded.

"Hold on with all those boats," was Kettle's next order, and as the panic-stricken mob showed no inclination of listening to him, he picked up an ax and stove in one after another. "By James!" he shouted, "if any of you swine think you can navigate the South Atlantic on a ladder you may go, but otherwise you'll stay on this packet till I give you leave to quit."

One boat only reached the water and pushed off, and this was the unprovisioned, over-loaded lifeboat which had left the davits before Captain Kettle interfered. Three men pulled at her oars. Two baled with boots and one with a bucket, and it was plain to see that the water gained on them.

Kettle hailed them. "Here, you in that starboard lifeboat! Come back here out of the wet. You dirty coal heavers, you no-sailors, your

boat's swamping. Come back here before you drown."

"By crumbs," cried one of the lifeboat's crew, "the plug's out, that's why the bally boat's sinking. Here, give me a thole pin, and I'll whittle that down into shape."

Captain Kettle lifted an accurate pistol, and from his perch high above the boat, drove a bullet through her floorboards. "There's another hole for you. Now let me see any swine try to plug it and I'll drop him. Here, you at that steering oar, turn her head in to those falls, or, by James, I'll make a vacancy for a new coxswain. Give way there, you tailors!"

The boat drew in to the *Ashville's* side, hooked on, and Kettle sketched patterns over her crew with a revolver muzzle. The boat was lifted, baled, and hoisted up to the davits.

The stolid, elderly Mr. Brodie, seeing the way things were going, had lowered himself over the counter by a rope's end, had swung on to the rudder pendants, and from that unstable point of vantage had made a survey of the wreck. By the time the boats were inboard again and secured, he had made his way up to the bridge once more, and stood there exuding seawater, ready with his report.

"Well?" said Kettle, "could you see the damage plainly?"

"The water's as clear as gin. The tail-shaft's in two half way, and the outer end's just dropped clean out of her."

"Where's the propeller?"

"With the shank of the tail-shaft. I don't know what are the soundings here."

"About two miles, as near as might be," said Kettle grimly, "so we shan't anchor. We shall drift. If you want to know how long we shall drift, it will be just the time you take to get her under steam again. I see by Captain Carmichael's lists that she carries a spare section of shafting and a spare propeller. I want them shipped."

Brodie shook his head. "Contract too big."

"Not for me. If you don't see your way to making those repairs at sea, I'll show you how."

"Look here, Captain, I'm a fully qualified engineer, and I don't need teaching my business by anybody."

"My man," said Kettle acidly, "if I'd the Emperor of Germany on board here as an officer of mine, and he didn't do his job exactly as I wanted, I'd teach him, tough nut though he may think himself. Now you aren't the Emperor of Germany by a long fathom."

"What's striking me is, do the owners want her brought home again?"

"I fail to see why not. She's a valuable steamboat."

"Well, Captain, in your ear, I've a mind that that tail-shaft was as sound as a bell, and somebody's helped it in two with a few cakes of gun cotton."

"Nothing to do with me."

"Oh, of course, sir, if you understand the owners' wishes, I've nothing more to say."

"Mr. Brodie, I've asked for owners' instructions from two people, and they have both flatly refused to give any. Half an hour ago some one else was in command of this packet. But it seems that I'm skipper now, and by James, I'm going to be it, and act just as my conscience dictates. If they'd treated me openly they could have found no more obedient servant on all the seas. But I'll teach the beggars I'm not the man to be suspicious of."

Forthwith the *Ashville* became a very inferno of activity. Her crew worked with frantic energy, impelled thereto by the example and the fist of Captain Owen Kettle; and steam, and every mechanical device clever minds could contrive, seconded their efforts. The ponderous length of spare shafting was got out from below, and lay on the quarter deck,

rusting under tropical sunlight. A great propeller was brought up and laid beside it.

Meanwhile clacking bilge pumps had cleared the engine-room of water, and opened valves had let water into the false bottom forward. But that did not bring her sufficiently by the head. The after hatches were pulled off, derricks rigged, and the rattling winches struck out cargo which was carried forward and built up on the forecastle head. The *Ashville* was taking out machinery—so her manifest said—and the machinery in its massive wooden cases made desperately heavy loads to carry along the reeling, uneven decks of the steamer.

But as her head was depressed, and her stern lifted higher, the vessel began to swing like a vane head to wind, and when at last her stem was almost buried in the seas, her sternpost was sufficiently lifted to show the shaft tunnel clear of the water.

Then began the heaviest labor of all. From the steamer's meagre spars, shears and a staging had to be erected over the stern, and tackles set up which could handle enormous weights. So far the work had been hurried on at full pressure under the glare of an equatorial sun by day and to the dazzle of arc lamps when the sea was covered by night. The *Ashville* was provisioned only for the run between Las Palmas and Santos, and undue prolonga-

tion of the passage spelt starvation. Indeed, the slender Board of Trade "whack" had been halved from the very day of the smash. But when the shears were erected, the steamer bucked for three whole days over a ponderous swell, and work on repairs was entirely out of the question. There was nothing for it but to sit and wait, and watch starvation grow more unpleasantly near.

The crew at that time wished to repair the boats. But Kettle would not let them be touched. He had pinned his honor and his reputation on making good the damage, and bringing in his vessel under steam, and he knew that nothing short of desperation could bring this to pass. If, when it came to the final pinch, his crew saw any other way of escape, they would take it in spite of his pistol and all his teeth.

A calm came at last, and the gaunt, sun-scorched men attacked the work savagely. The ship's stores were slender, and the wrecked tunnel in which most of the work had to be done was desperately narrow. But they knew their trade, and toiled at it with skilled sinews. They removed the length of shaft next the tail-shaft from its bearings. They withdrew the broken section into the tunnel, handling the great masses of metal with tackle contrived as the occasion arose. Then they put the new length

into the stern tube until its nose was just showing outside, and lowered the propeller into place. Next they jacked aft and home the tail-shaft, told off half a dozen men and an engineer to screw home the ponderous lock nuts, and even made a lignum vitæ bush for the stern gland. After which the weary work of shifting cargo was again gone through, till she was once more in her ordinary trim.

Then Brodie descended to his engine-room, and "took a turn from her."

It would be flattering to say that the result was anywhere near perfection. There was a grating and a groaning, and a rumbling like a railway train going over an iron bridge. The whole steamer shuddered as though the operation pained her. But, as the old chief said, the main thing was, they did go round, and the propeller seemed inclined to stay where it was put, and he on his part was ready to guarantee seven knots when the forward tanks were emptied, and the cargo brought aft again, and the vessel's stern brought into trim.

A liking had sprung up between Kettle and Brodie during this fierce spell of labor, which led them into mutual civilities when once more the *Ashville* was moving steadily on toward her port in Brazil. Each, too, had a sailor's taste for drugs, and they discussed with much seri-

ious argument the virtues of Kopke's Competent Cure.

Kelly, the mate, had left behind him the wrappers of several bottles of this specific, and the two read these, and based upon them many ingenious theories. Kettle held that Kopke must have virtue, since it had obviously kept the mate alive long beyond his time. The engineer, strong in faith with an opposition patent medicine of his own, held, that though Kopke was good for the lungs and indigestion, it was valueless to succor a damaged heart. Each adduced the case of Kelly in support of his contentions.

"Well," said Kettle, at last, "I wish the poor chap could have spoken before he died, just to tell us. Besides, I think it was only due to Kopke that he should know. But as it was, the mate never got out another word after the apoplexy struck him."

The engineer scratched his nose with a black thumbnail. "If Mr. Mate could have talked, Skipper, I think he might have handed on as a last gasp those owners' instructions that you were so keen on getting."

"There's no telling. When a man's pegging out, it's quite a gamble what he talks about. Some think of their wives, some of kids, some of the last ra-ta they had ashore."

"Then I guarantee Kelly would have fetched up

those owners' instructions. He had a wife ashore, and kids. I knew 'em. And his last little ra-ta on the mud was his own bankruptcy. I don't know the owners' instructions, mind you, but I can make a hard guess at them, and they would all have connection with those other three things you mentioned.

"I'm just dead certain that he and Carmichael were set on to see this ship never got to Santos at all. Carmichael weakened, and took to the whiskey, and got into trouble at Tunis, as you know. Poor old blue-faced Kelly hung on. I've had my suspicions all along. I'd more suspicions when that shaft went. I heard gun cotton then, I smelt it, too, and I swear the shaft wouldn't have parted if it was treated fairly."

"Is there anything to prove that?"

"No, everything was blown conveniently away. But wait a minute. What were those cases filled with that you struck out of No. 4 hold?"

"Machinery. I thought of that myself. But you're wrong. They weren't filled with bricks or anything like that. Two or three of the cases broke, and I saw the machinery for myself."

"So did I. But here's where the expert comes in, Skipper. They were looms and spinning frames, and old ones at that. They were only fit for scrap.

They weren't worth more than two-and-six a hundredweight. Now, play on that."

"I don't want to," said the little sailor. "I've had my suspicions all along. Mr. Walpole, the agent in Tunis, let me see there was something wrong, but he wouldn't say what it was. Kelly was the same. And there are these other things. But I'm accustomed to being trusted, and I was not trusted here. Let an owner trust me, and I serve that man faithfully so long as I've hands, or wind, or tongue left to me. But if I'm sent on board with somebody else in authority over me, and that somebody else is removed, well, then they may look out. I just play the game of simple honesty."

"I'd do the same if I were in your shoes. It's time somebody made owners like those sit up. But there's one other thing. They'll fire you by cable in Santos. I don't know whether it matters to you?"

"It matters everything. I must have employment. I must. I've a wife and daughters on the farm at home in tremendous difficulties. But I don't think I shall lose my present job over this. My duty is to the owners first, of course—when I know what that duty is—but after them there's the British Consul to go to, and the next people to him are the underwriters. I don't think they'll fire me, Mr. Brodie. And finally, there's this——"

He took a small scrap of paper from his pocket-book, and laid it on the chart-table. Brodie leaned over and read it.

"We promise to pay to Captain Carmichael £6,000 for the loss of his clothes and effects if the 'Ashville' fails to come into port."

And the signature was that of the steamer's owners.

"I found it," said Kettle, "in Norie's 'Epitome' on the bookshelf up there. Carmichael must have been pretty drunk to leave such hanging evidence as that loose in an everyday book. But with that ready to hand over to a Consul, I don't think the firm will fire me, eh, Mr. Brodie?"

"By the Lord, Skipper, but you're a great man. If ever I get that tunnel-slide patent of mine floated, I'll take you into partnership. You've got what's better than ordinary brains. You've got diplomacy. You can make trouble where any ordinary man couldn't see a cat's chance of it. By goats, you can!"

CHAPTER IV.

SHANGHAIED.

"It looks to me, sir," said Trevor, the big mate, sulkily, "as if there's been too much of this hurry."

"Well, we're out of that stinking harbor and at sea, anyway," said Captain Graham.

"That's all very well, sir," grumbled the mate, "and I'm not shirking for myself. I'm willing to work till I drop."

"Yes, boy, I know that, and I shall report so to the firm when we get back home, and I'm sure I hope they give you the next vacant captaincy. I'm sure you deserve it, and you've had your skipper's ticket long enough."

"You've got to let me have my say," Trevor persisted doggedly. "I know quite well that it was awful gall to you not being able to get together a crew, and there was demurrage running up, and that agent just dancing to see us away to sea. But what's the result? Here's a big lump of a 6,000 ton steamer and not enough deckhands for a 500 ton coaster. And down in the stokehold they're just

as bad. It isn't sailor-men I'm asking for. Any of their bally Argentine agriculturists would have done for me. But we haven't even got enough of them. And what we have shipped seem dead."

"Oh, they'll come to when they've had their sleep out."

"I wish I could think so. I've seen drugged men before, but none so bad as these. They're all twisted up in knots. That Spanish skunk of a boarding-house master that put them on board, must have mixed strychnine and sulphuric acid in the drink that laid them out, if one can judge by appearances. There's one of them, a littlish chap with a red peaked beard and a goodish lot of nose, that seems to me about dead already. I lifted one of his eyelids and put my finger on the eyeball, and that generally makes them wince unless they are about gone, but it got not so much as a wink from this joker."

"Well, Mr. Trevor, you've made your protest, and you can give it me in writing if you like, and a fat lot of good that will do. I hate putting to sea short-handed as much as you do, and when you've come to my time of life you'll understand that this infernal sailoring trade is mostly made up of doing things you dislike. I know just as well as you do the risks of taking a big, heavy steamboat like this across from South America to Liverpool practically without a

crew. But it's been done before, and the odds are we do it again. I stand to lose more than you do if we hit an accident. If there's an inquiry——"

"Oh, of course, if it comes to that, I back you up loyally. Glosh! Yes."

"I know you would. But, let evidence be given how you like, it's astonishing how things do come out at one of their beastly inquiries. Anyway, you wouldn't even be censured, while the odds are I should lose my ticket. And I can no more help the state of things than you can."

"They couldn't have kicked the old packet out of the harbor without your consent," Trevor grumbled.

"You make me tired. Of course they couldn't. But, if you want to know the truth, I'll just tell you how it stands. I protested all I knew, and at last that dirty Greek agent handed me a cablegram that had just come in hot from Liverpool. All the firm could understand was that the ship had been delayed ten days because I didn't get her a crew, and all the time wages, and capital, and demurrage, and so on were running to waste. Natural they should look at it that way, I guess. So the cable gave Stephanopoulos clear instructions to fire me if I didn't contrive to get to sea in two days' time, and give you my berth. Now, boy, what would you have done if you suddenly found yourself a full-blown skipper

on the one condition of taking a boat to sea short-handed?"

"Jumped at it, and cabled my girl I was coming home to marry her right off."

Captain Graham sighed drearily. "I married mine more years ago than I care to think about, and since then I've been keeping her and some little chaps she's given me, by the only means I know, and that's by carrying out the firm's instructions. It's you giddy bachelors that jibe at things. You wait, boy, till you're married, and the house begins to fill, and you'll tuck in your tail, and sing small, and take risks, and see accidents don't happen, and grow gray hairs like the rest of us."

The big mate rubbed his chin uncomfortably. "Ye—es, it isn't much of a prospect by all accounts. Well, I'm sorry I grumbled, sir. I'll do my best, of course, and for the present I suppose I'd better relieve the second mate at the wheel. Glosh! but it's a bit tough when you haven't even deckhands enough to take one wheel a watch."

And to the squat little second mate when he relieved him, and had received the course, in reply to a grunted question, he said: "Oh, the usual, no bally use. The Old Man hates it as much as we do. But there's no choice. Who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea?"

The squat little second mate grunted his annoyance. He was never a man of words.

At midnight Trevor and the second engineer, both of them leaden-lidded and sick for the want of sleep, went to the fireman's forecastle and by blows and curses got together a watch to relieve the one below, and driving these before him, the second engineer was going to return to his regions of coal dust and oil.

But when they stepped out once more on to the reeling main deck under the starlight, Trevor stopped him. "Look here, Mac, fair dos. I've helped you with your mob, so just bear a hand with mine."

"My name's not Mac, but I'm ready to help. What's the trouble?" He pulled a heavy three-quarter inch spanner out of his jacket pocket. "Anything in this line?"

"Oh, I should say they're all too sick to offer any fighting. Our crowd's been shanghaied just like yours, only ours has had the strongest dose. Here, come in. Glosh! Doesn't it look like an undertaker's storeroom?"

"Stinks like one. Phew! Cross between a next-morning public house and a stale chemist's shop. Merry life of it an old sailor seems to have."

"You never said a truer word, Notmac, my boy.

Let it be a lesson to you. Don't you ever curse an engine-room again. Here, let me clean up the globe of the incandescent a bit, and have a wink more light on this scene of beauty. Glosh! Think of those as deckhands. Half of them snoring like apoplexy, and the other half of them not breathing at all. Just put your hand on this joker's head, Notmac."

"My Christmas! he's dead!"

"Dead as Julius Cæsar. Healthy sort of joke that to play on a man, isn't it? How they think I'm going to work this packet across the big drink, glosh knows."

"Has that poor wretch been drugged to death?" asked the second engineer with a scared look.

The big mate made a quick examination, and brought away his hand all reddened. "The chap's head's been caved in; sandbagged, probably; they were pretty hard nuts ashore. But being sorry for him doesn't provide me with deckhands, does it? Send me up a firebar, Notmac, and I'll make it fast to Julius Cæsar's heels, and we'll drop him over into the ditch when some of the others come-to a bit tomorrow. Now, who's in this next bunk? Oh, yes, the small man with the nose and the red peaked beard. You don't look particularly healthy, my tulip. Here, come out of that, and let's look at you on the floor."

It was very clear evidence of the state in which poor Captain Kettle then was, that he bore his rough decanting without so much as the feeblest protest. He lay there on the dirty deck planks of that sailors' forecastle with eyes half shut and breathing stertorous.

The two officers eyed him with doubtful looks. They exchanged their opinions in high voices, as the noise of the seas which beat on the plates outside filled the place with clangor.

"Now, that's a man," said the engineer, "that could give trouble if there was only a bit more of him. Look at that face, and look at that jaw."

"That's a man that will have to work," said Trevor, "and if he doesn't work willingly, he'll work otherwise. He hasn't the look of a deckhand, I'll admit. He may be fifty things. But here he is, and deckhand he's got to be, and there's no mistake about it that he will work as such. It's my job to see that he does. That's what I'm mate of this packet for, Notmac."

"Well, you may be thankful there's not much of him," the engineer persisted.

The half-naked little form on the swaying deck stirred uneasily, and struggled stiffly up on to an elbow. The dull eyes unlidded themselves a trifle

further. A dry, half-choked voice gasped out: "Size is no object to me. I've tackled three as big as you and—bashed their heads together. Yes, by James, and—can do it again."

"Glosh!" cried Trevor. "How's that for a half-dead bantam?"

"Hear the way he speaks though," said the engineer. "The chap's got a mouth on him like the bottom of a parrot cage."

He picked up a tin mug from one of the lockers, went outside on to the main deck to fill it, and returned. He held it toward Kettle with rough kindness. "Here, squire, let that sizzle down over your coppers. I've been on the tiles myself, and know what it's like."

"Tiles?" Kettle glared at the Samaritan, but drank thirstily none the less. "Tiles! Are you a doctor? Great James, no. You're a split-trousered mechanic. This isn't the boarding-house, either."

"It's your boarding-house, my man, till we get to Liverpool," said the big mate, with grim geniality. "So you'd better make the pleasantest of it."

Captain Kettle shuddered, blinked, and stared around him. "A bally fo'c'stle! A stinking half-wedge of an electric-lighted steamboat's fo'c'stle.

And you're Mr. Mate, I suppose. Oh, great James! my head. I've been shanghaied, and that's what's the matter with me."

He tottered to his feet, and stood there swaying. Then his dulled eye fell on his clothing, and his cheek lit up with blushes.

In person and attire it was his pride to be one of the neatest and sprucest of men, and here he was, filthy and disreputable beyond words. He was figged out in a faded blue dungaree overall, an ingenious garment made all in one piece, which is affected by American mechanics, and the patients in the epileptic-idiot wards of British asylums. His feet were bare and dirty; his head was bare and towsled; his red peaked beard was a nest of litter; his hands were black; the overalls themselves were gratuitously daubed with grease and grime.

Trevor watched the passage of his eye. "You don't seem to admire yourself. I must say you are a filthy-looking beachcomber. But if you'll clean up a bit, I'll see if I can't get some duds out of the slop chest that will be down to your size. After that, you quite understand, you'll have to turn to. I wonder if you're man enough to twig a course, if it's given you, and take a wheel."

Captain Kettle made a few remarks about the slop chest, and the mate's personal appearance, and other

matters that were very much to the point. He had seldom used his bitter little tongue with more effect.

Trevor winced. "Now clearly understand, you ugly little ruffian, that I'm your superior officer, and I'll take no purple language from you or any one else with whiskers on."

"You'll just take what's given you," replied Kettle, with open truculence, and then they closed.

The big mate, confident in his thews and his professional skill as a fighting man, made the initial mistake of despising his antagonist, and as a consequence, before enough time had passed for one of his sledgehammer blows to get home, he tore himself away from the struggle with a shriek of surprise and pain, and stood back with fingers carefully fumbling at one of his eyeballs.

The engineer lifted his spanner threateningly. "Has the beggar stabbed you?"

"Stabbed, no. But he got his thumb in my eye-socket, and by glosh, he darned nearly had the eye-ball out."

Kettle staggered to a sea-chest, and sat there sick and half fainting. "I never—gouge," he gasped, "if there's anything else—to be done. But I'm poorly now and not up to form. If you'll wait an hour or so—till I've—pulled round—I'll fight you

level. If you come at me again now—I'll have that eye clean out and—tread on it."

Trevor looked at him thoughtfully. "You're a fair sportsman, and that's a fact. I wonder what the blazes to do with you."

"Send me back, and we'll call it quits. I've some very pressing business ashore."

"Oh, it's probable we shall turn the packet round and steam back just for your convenience. Perhaps you'd like to navigate her in yourself?"

"Why, of course, if I'm wanted. I know the fairway into the harbor as well as any of those blessed dago pilots."

Trevor tenderly rubbed at his bruised eyeball. "Now look here, my man, who might you be? You aren't an Argentine farmer, and you don't seem quite a deckhand. But for the sake of fiction, I'd just like to have your own account of yourself before I turn you to on a job."

"Kettle's my name, and I held a master's ticket when you were being spanked on a training ship."

"Not by any chance the captain," interrupted the engineer, "who brought in the *Ashville* the day before we sailed?"

"Yes, sir."

"And fitted her with a new tail-shaft in mid-ocean?"

"Well, you see, some one had to do it."

"My Christmas, but it's a thing that's only been done six times in all history. We mustn't make you a deckhand here."

"Steady on," said Trevor warningly. "You go slow, Notmac, and keep your spare philanthropy for the stokehold. I'm very sorry for Captain Kettle's misfortunes, but I don't see how we can spare a single one of our hands who have signed on as such. As for running back to put him ashore on South America again, of course that's skittles. However, it's a thing our Old Man shall decide, and in the meanwhile, as none of these gentlemen in the forecastle seem ripe for work just now, they'd better stay below for another watch, and finish snoring off their drug."

Now, Captain Graham was an easy-going man, and his great ambition at sea was to work his ship between ports with the smallest outlay of trouble. The big mate reported to him when he came on the bridge yawning and blinking, in the morning, that one of the new shipped deckhands was "a stone broke skipper of sorts, according to his own account," and asked for instructions.

Captain Graham swigged thirstily at his coffee. "Oh, I'm afraid he'll have to turn to. You mates are put on already, far more than's proper. I dare-

say this man Kettle's had bad luck, but he must stand to it like the rest of us have to. What's the matter with your eye? Have you been trying to break him up, and did he paste you? Do you want me to come down and bear a hand?"

"When I want your help, sir, I'll come and ask you for it, and till then I'm mate of this packet, and I know my job, and can do it. I only wanted to know where I stood."

Now, part of the professional equipment of mates in the British merchant service is a sound knowledge of the arts of man-driving and self-defence, and Trevor flattered himself that few men living could give him lessons on either subject. But he was sensible enough to take precautions, and, having had already one taste of the quality of the little person with the red peaked beard, was in no mood for further surprises. If Kettle, in a half-fainting condition, could very nearly gouge him, Kettle refreshed by another eight hours' sleep might well be dangerous.

So on his next visit to the forecastle he took with him a revolver, and was prepared, if necessary, to use it, as the law of mates directs. The other lodgers in the forecastle might have come to their senses by this time (those of them who did not happen to be dead, that is) and outraged humanity of that

class is apt to be violent. Indeed, it took an officer with a lot of full-blooded courage to go near that forecastle at all.

But, as it chanced, Captain Kettle had waked up some half hour previously, had glared with disgust at his own personal uncleanliness, and had gone out to wash himself. Instinct made him pick a belaying pin out of the rail, and instinct was presently making him use it. The big mate came to the forecastle doorway, and threw into it a roar of sound. "Now, you skulkers, turn out. Where's that man Kettle? I'm going to have him turn out first of all."

"I've told you who I am," said Kettle dangerously.

"And I've told the Old Man, and he says he's the only captain on this packet, and we carry no passengers. So you'll just turn to. You hear me?"

What followed passed quickly. Kettle rushed, and the mate flung up his pistol hand for a snap shot. The belaying pin crashed sideways on to the mate's wrist, and a lighter bone would have cracked. As it was, the revolver clattered down on to the deck, and Kettle was driving the big mate aft under a shower of blows. Captain Owen Kettle, from long acquaintance with that weapon, was an artist with a belaying pin. He knew where to hit, and how to hit, and, moreover, he kept on hitting. He

showed exquisite skill in contriving that his opponent should have no chance to turn.

Right across the main deck did he chivvy Mr. Trevor and into the starboard alleyway, where that unfortunate man dived into the engineer's mess-room, and slammed the door. But there the little sailor turned, and made his way sharply back to the forecastle.

The revolver had vanished, but he made a sharp demand for it. "Now, look here," he said, "that's my gun, and I want it handed over quick, or I'll wade in and murder the lot of you."

The weapon was surrendered with nervous hurry. "If you're going to stick up for our rights, pard, I'm on," said one. "The shark that shanghaied us will have touched all our advance notes, and there'll be no wages to pocket at the other end, unless we put in a fresh claim and get the skipper to agree. I got no use for working for nothing."

"What are you all? Deckhands?"

"You can log us as such."

"Well and good. I should advise you to turn to, or you'll have the mates coming in here and red war made."

"But," gasped the fellow, "that's just what you've been fighting against yourself, pard."

"I'll thank you to call me 'sir,' when you speak. I'm Captain Owen Kettle, and your superior, and what I choose to do is no bally concern of yours. By James, no! I'm a man that requires respect, and gets it."

Captain Kettle cocked his chin, and marched out of the forecastle on to the main deck. At the starboard side of the upper deck a very indignant mate was trying to convince that easy-going person, Captain Graham, that the forward end of the ship was in a state of rapid mutiny, and that he had been set upon by a coalition of the whole of the deckhands. Kettle saw, heard and hankered. His alone was the credit of the overthrow, and he was keenly desirous of going up to claim it, and to partake in whatever other scuffle might follow upon such a rash announcement.

But the obscene filth of that one garment that covered his nakedness flashed up into his mind, and, with warm blushes covering him, he made for the port ladder, and ran nimbly and silently up to the upper deck. One door of the chart-house lay open before him. He stepped inside, closing it sharply. Captain Graham and Trevor were within a yard of the starboard door, and at the slam, were disturbed for an instant in their conversation.

But before they knew of the invasion, and cer-

tainly before they had any idea of taking action, Kettle stepped across the chart-house deck, and swung-to that door also, shooting the heavy brass bolts at its head and foot. Then he paid similar attention to the door he had entered by, and by that time the starboard porthole framed segments of the faces of Captain Graham and his mate, flushed in color, and emitting quarrelsome language.

There were three other portholes to the chart-house, and Kettle closed them all, screwing home the clamps, and sliding over each the green curtain which ran on a rod above it, all to a fine accompaniment of remarks from the two onlookers. He came to them at last.

"If you'll be advised by me," he said, "you'll take those faces away from here and tow them overboard for half an hour to cool. At the end of that time I shall have leisure to talk to you again." With which remark he slammed the heavy, brass-framed glass against their noses, screwed home the clamps, and coyly shrouded that also with its appointed blind. Then, with disgusted fingers, he stripped from his body the comprehensive garment in which he stood, swung down and filled Captain Graham's folding washbasin, and gave his spare, muscular little body a most thorough grooming.

Outside the stronghold threats were being pelted

at him with noisy vehemence. But he was too much engaged in the pleasures of the toilet to find leisure for suitable retort. He overhauled the drawers and lockers which held Captain Graham's spare apparel, and viewed each item with renewed distaste. The waistcoats lacked buttons, the shirts and collars were badly got up, the sleeves of the coats were ragged in the cuff. But in a distant corner Kettle discovered the usual biscuit-box containing needles and thread, and after attiring himself in a shirt and white drill trousers, proceeded to darn a pair of socks, to mend a pair of canvas shoes, to repair a waistcoat, and finally to take in the back seams of a white drill coat so as to fit the more slender lines of his own slim figure.

In the meanwhile there was no attempt at storming his fortress. The chart-house was built of iron, and its doors were of three-inch teak, and, although its outraged proprietor might by the aid of the carpenter have battered down a door, or stove in the glass of a port, he possessed an uncomfortable feeling that the invader still carried his belaying pin and the mate's revolver, and would certainly use both vigorously before he was captured.

Trevor was all for an immediate assault. He was a man of full-blooded courage, and felt deeply the insults he had already received himself, the insult to

the ship, and the insult to his captain, and spoke of them all in bitter words. But Captain Graham was an easy-going man. He said that one-half bottle of rye whiskey represented all the provisions in the chart-house, and that in due time the invader would come out weak with hunger, and surrender himself to justice without a scuffle.

"It's no use getting on a high horse," said Graham placidly. "If we bashed down one of the chart-house doors, it would be a bigger job than Chips could repair on board, and it would have to be reported to the superintendent ashore, and as likely as not he'd hand it on to the office, and then there'd be paraffin in the fire."

"Well, I don't know," grumbled the big mate.

"Oh, you'd like to shine as a warrior, would you? Well, I've given up being martial. I like to take things easy, and if you let 'em alone long enough, it's surprising how often they come out all right."

Now, Captain Kettle had been under no illusions about the victualing of his fortress. With pocket knife and needle he unpicked, re-cut, and stitched till he had produced a well-fitting jacket. He arrayed himself in it, looked himself carefully over in the small rectangular glass above the washstand, and then frowned and took it off again. The edges of the sleeves were frayed, and he abused Captain Graham

as he set to work and turned them in. Then, when finally dressed, he took out the whiskey bottle (which he had found long before), helped himself to a stiff second mate's nip, opened one of the ports, and pressed the button of the electric bell.

The captain's steward came up from below, and after some hurried instructions, rapped at the door, and said "Yessir."

"Bring tea," Kettle demanded, "and some good thick corned beef sandwiches with pickles in them."

"Yessir. Shall I come and lay a cloth in there?"

"No. You can hand the stuff in through the port."

The legitimate tenant of the chart-house was close outside, and this last request was too much for even his easy-going temper. "Hand somewhere-hot in through the port. Come out, you skulking, dirty pirate, and face the music like a man. You filthy, crawling beachcomber, d'ye think I'll let you order victuals like that aboard of me?"

The bolts of the door snapped back, the lock and the handle turned, and there was Captain Kettle on the threshhold, spruce, truculent and ready.

"If you want a row, by James, I'm not the man to balk you. My name is Captain O. Kettle, as I've informed Mr. Mate already, and as you've got me on

this packet against my convenience, you've jolly well got to treat me with proper respect, or I'll make hay round here in a way that will surprise you."

"I don't see what you can do," the other grumbled doubtfully.

"If you want to see, just mention it," retorted Kettle.

"You've got the pistol, I'll admit. But there are only four chambers loaded, so Trevor said, and even if you did contrive to make use of those, there'd be plenty of us left to swamp you. Besides, you needn't be sure of hitting anybody at all. Pistol shots miss."

"Mine don't. If you'll put your pipe in your mouth, I'll break the stem of it for you at ten yards every time."

"My pipe does very well as it is," said Graham drily. "Look here, suppose you go down below and get a meal, and then we'll talk."

"I prefer my own orders to be carried out. I told your steward to bring tea and corned beef sandwiches in here, and it's right here I want them. If you'd like a final clincher as to why I'm going to have my own way, look at this." He brought from his pocket a sheaf of documents, tied together with spun yarn and weighted with a heavy leaden ink bottle. "Here's your ship's papers. Now, if you

begin to worry me, over into the ditch they go as a start."

This was too much for even Graham's equanimity.

"Good Heavens, man, if you throw those overboard you'll ruin me."

"D'ye suppose I don't know that?"

"Well, man, have some consideration."

"Why should I? What consideration have you shown for me? I was shanghaied, which is an accident, I'll admit, if you like, that might happen to anybody. I find myself in your beastly fo'c'stle. I send aft my name, and mention that I carry a master's ticket. Do you give word that I'm to be treated as one gentleman should treat another who has met with misfortune? Not you. You tell the mate to turn me on as a deckhand, and break me up if I turn rusty. Well, Mr. Mate was well intentioned, but the job was beyond his limit. I've broke up six the size of Mr. Mate before now all at once, and all on my very own. So that's how we stand, and now I'd like to hear the rest of the programme."

"If you put back those papers where you took them from, there's a spare room down below that you can have for the run home."

The little sailor put the papers in a drawer beside him, locked it, and threw Graham the keys.

"But if you think you're going to come aboard of me, and take charge, and scoff my clothes, and grab free passages all for nothing, well, there you make a mistake. I shall give you in charge as soon as she is docked, and we'll see what a magistrate's got to say on the subject."

"About that you can do as you choose. But in the meanwhile I want that tea and sandwiches. Slack seems to do for you, Captain, but while I'm here, that steward's got to be smart if he's going to avoid trouble with me."

Now Captain Kettle's dignity had been badly hurt, and this was an offence he did not forgive easily. Captain Graham, to save himself trouble, was disposed to hold out the olive branch; but he did this neither gracefully nor often; and Kettle was disposed to take no half advances. The engineer who went by the name of Notmac was openly full of admiration for that repair of a tail-shaft at sea, but Kettle respected himself too much to come down to familiar terms with a mere subordinate engineer; and as for Trevor, the pair of them never met without preparing for battle.

Kettle lived for the most part in the room which had been assigned to him, eating there, and on occasion, it is to be supposed, taking some rest, though no one on board through all the voyage caught him

with a shut eye. For occupation he had procured paper and a piece of pencil, and produced verse of such pleasing quality, that at times it even found favor with that severe critic, himself.

But on the whole, the ship's officers had leisure to give him little enough attention. The hardly used crew were in a state of chronic mutiny. Twice, indeed, they sent deputations to that successful mutineer, Captain Kettle, praying that he would lead them in any kind of outbreak he cared to organize. But Kettle was intensely loyal to his cloth, and drove these back with tongue and toe, and they had to content themselves with unorganized measures, which consisted chiefly of passive disobedience to orders. The vessel had bad luck in the way of weather also, and it is probable that few 6,000 ton tramps have ever wallowed more uncomfortably home across the two Atlantics.

Still, there is a deadly certainty about steam, and the big cargo boat pegged away, reeling off the knots with a callous disregard for the personal discomforts of her population; and the nearer he got to home, so much the nearer did Captain Kettle see an unsympathetic magistrate, with the door of an ugly jail just behind his elbow. He himself was a man with an instinctive dread of shore law, and at sea made the law for himself. But he grew an opinion

that Graham was his opposite in this respect. Graham had proved openly that he was no hand at reforming an unruly crew on the spot, and Kettle naturally set him among that class which prefers to take its criminals before police or consular courts ashore.

For himself, in this event, he saw no loophole. Papers he had none. He had been sent on board stripped. His name would be on the ship's articles, signed with a cross—the shipping agent would have seen to that. The magistrate, on Captain Graham's word, would decide his case in two minutes, and send him down for two months' hard, if not more. For the disgrace of this he had small concern. But once in prison he could not earn money, and the mortgage on the Wharfedale farm where his family lived was dangerously overdue, and must be paid. It was this that decided him.

The night they picked up the coast he raided the steward's pantry, and carried to one of the quarter-boats bottles of water, a box of biscuits and four tins of meat. He cast off the awning, threw out the falls, cut the grips, and swung the davits. One of the deckhands saw him at this point, and out of sheer malice gave the alarm. A very angry Trevor dropped down off the upper bridge and came running aft. Kettle lowered away handsomely on the

falls, and the boat hit the water with a heavy smack, riding there at the end of her painter, and bumping dangerously alongside.

Kettle had his pistol still, and had half a mind to stop its former owner with a shot. Out at sea he probably would have done so. But in soundings he grew more law-respecting. He reached out for the falls, and slid down to the boat almost at the pace of a dropping stone.

The boat leaped and swayed beneath him, and water sliced up in heavy sheets between her and the steamer's side. Kettle unhooked one of the blocks. The furious mate leaped to the fall of the other to haul it taut and spill the boat. But Kettle, with the tiller, contrived to jam that in the sheave, and presently had managed to haggle through the fall with a table knife—the only cutlery he had got with him; and then in the nick of time, for the quarter-boat was swamping beneath him, cast off his painter, and bobbled away on the yeasty wake astern.

The big steamboat slid out into the night ahead, and if she returned to find him, he did not see her. It was his business next to bale the boat clear, and afterward to ship his rudder and step the mast. Then, with lug-sail hoisted, he sat at the tiller and stood in for the coast.

He reached it with the dawn, and concerning the

future fate of the quarter-boat the present historian can tell nothing further. But Captain Owen Kettle, with an unbroken spirit, set out once more over the face of the country to find employment which would bring him in that most necessary income.

As it happened, a report of that tramp steamer's coming into dock has reached me. Captain Graham buttoned a collar on to his rumpled shirt, fitted in his three false teeth, and went ashore. He told the superintendent that the passage had been a beast, and that they had lost one of the quarter-boats in a breeze. He gave some details about the shanghaied crew. But he made no mention whatever of having entertained Captain Owen Kettle. He was an easy-going man.

There was silence on the matter also from other quarters. "Glosh!" said Trevor to his friend, the second engineer, "I should like to put a spoke in that little beggar's wheel, Notmac, even if our Old Man won't."

"Still, I'll bet you never do," said the second engineer, and the second mate, who was never a person of words, grunted adhesion to this idea.

CHAPTER V.

THE SUBMARINE BOAT.

"FUNNY name—Kettle," said the fat man with the glass eye.

"Shouldn't advise you to tell him so," snapped little O'Hagan. "He takes himself pretty seriously, and if some of us followed his example in that respect we should get through a lot more business. I've no use, personally, for making myself ridiculous."

Burke, the man with the glass eye, reddened with fury.

"You know I only meant it as a joke, and the joke didn't come off, that was all. How was I to guess they'd be such abject fools as to stop the ship, and send a diver down, and find there was no gun-cotton in the thing after all? Any other navy with a cent's worth of sense would have taken it for granted the thing was a torpedo and skipped. But those fool English were too dull to think they might get hurt, and they are as curious as monkeys. But" —he thumped the table—"I'll have no more of this.

I may have made an error, but I have been twitted about it sufficiently. There was nothing criminal in what I did. No one ever suggested yet that I wasn't thrue to Ireland. No one has ever chucked out hints that I was an informer."

"What!" the frail O'Hagan stamped to his feet.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" The girl at the end of the table, who had sat still, biting her lip, during all this wrangle, interrupted them sharply.

They broke off and faced her with some confusion.

"I used to be cold and contemptuous," she said bitterly, "when I read in the English papers of some great Irish meeting described as 'the usual Donnybrook.' But now, when I see that taunt, it makes me hot with shame, because I know it is true. Can't we even here learn to control ourselves, and stick to the business we've come about? Is there some curse on the race that always makes us behave like fractious children?"

O'Hagan bit his lips. "Miss Ffrench is right. We seem born with an unfortunate knack of riling one another. Burke, I beg your pardon. Let's please consider all these last remarks eliminated, and get back to Captain Kettle. I don't see what's wrong with having him up right now."

"That suits me," said Burke, "unless Miss Ffrench

wants to give us any more pointers first. No? Then I'll go and fetch him."

Presently Captain Kettle stepped briskly into the room, and bowed politely to the lady. "Most pleased to make your acquaintance, miss," said he, on being presented. "Mr. Burke did not tell me this was a yachting job. I thought it was business."

Captain Kettle observed that the lady rebel was deliciously pretty, and put on his pleasantest manner. He had always had an eye for a good-looking woman. Indeed, Mrs. Kettle herself had first attracted him by her outward person, and it was not till after long acquaintanceship with her across the bar where she did business that he found those deeper qualities which brought him into her service, and held him there with such unwavering faithfulness.

Miss Ffrench knew her power, and used it to the full. She gave the spruce little sailor the kindest of looks, but it was the bitter O'Hagan who thrust himself out as spokesman.

"The employment we offer you, Captain, is not to conduct a yachting cruise, nor yet could it be exactly described as business. But until we learn your definite decision as to whether or not you are going to enter our employ, there are reasons why we should not be too precise. I'm putting the mat-

ter frankly, you see, and if you're offended I hope you won't trouble to conceal it."

"If I'm offended, sir," said Kettle, with acid politeness, "people usually know it without delay. But in this particular instance I'm not a man that can afford to pick and choose employment. As I told your Mr. Burke here, I'm in severe financial difficulties for the moment. You see, owing to agricultural depression, we've not been doing as well as could be expected, and there's a mortgage on the farm."

"You are interested in agriculture?" said the girl. "Then you will be able to sympathize with poor Ireland."

"Certainly, miss; I've never been in Ireland myself but once, and that was under rather distressful circumstances. But I made poetry about the country that seemed to me to carry both tune and truth with it. There was one set of verses which began 'Peaceful isle of simple green,' which appeared to me at the time singularly chaste and original. If you like, miss, and these gentlemen will excuse me, it would give me sincere pleasure to repeat them to you."

The girl's lip quivered, and Burke blew his nose and wiped a tear out of the corner of his glass eye. O'Hagan frowned aside the interruption. "Come

now, Captain, we're wasting your time. Do you agree to join, and what's your figure?"

"You can have me as low as £14 a month, sir, and if the job looks like a permanency I might do it for even a trifle less. I'm very anxious for those at home to have a steady half-pay of mine to draw upon."

"Ah, I see." O'Hagan looked at him queerly. "What should you say now to £30 a month?"

"I should say there was something fishy about it."

"There'll be some risk."

"Any sailor man expects that."

"There'll be fighting, too. I suppose that will put you off?"

"If," said Captain Kettle unpleasantly, "you'd done one-twentieth of the fighting I've put in at one time and another, you'd retire into private life."

O'Hagan laughed and flushed with self-contempt. "I'm not a fighting man, and I admit it. I've a weak heart, and a weak nerve; but I can plan, and I can invent, and what we want is a man capable of carrying out the result of my plans and inventions. Come now, Captain, you must give us a plain answer. Do you join or not? It seems to me the job looks a bit too troublesome for your appetite, and we don't want to have you refuse, and then go away and be able to talk."

"I've no choice about the matter, sir. I've got to have employment. I join, certainly."

Burke wavered an eye over him. "Isn't there some story about the police rather wanting you? I don't want to be rude, you know. It's a thing that might happen to anybody."

Captain Kettle pulled at his red torpedo beard. "I'll not deny, sir, that I've been in trouble. But I've heard of no warrant being out, and it wouldn't surprise me if none was issued. They'd nothing to be proud of. There was just me—one man—and I very sick at the time, and hadn't so much as a gun to help things along with. On their side there was a whole army of them, with certainly one pistol fit for business, and a whole ship stuck full of belaying pins. It doesn't matter what the difference was about, but there's the odds, and when we had our scrap I came out on top, yes, and, by James! could do it again. They let me crow over them from start to finish, and you don't tell me they'd want to reel out a yarn like that before a stipendiary, which they'd have to do before they could get a warrant."

The girl's face glowed as she listened. She stood up and shook Captain Kettle's hand. "You are just the brave man we want," she cried. "I can see it. The justice of our cause you will come to appre-

ciate later. But to begin with, you are a man who loves a fight for a fight's sake."

Kettle dropped the lady's hand and sighed heavily. "That's true, miss. Heaven knows it's true, and that it's my greatest weakness. Ashore in England I try to live a Christian life, and have met with considerable success in the attempt. You may have heard of the Wharfedale Particular Methodists? I'm founder of that sect, miss, and we've probably got a more sharply defined creed than any other religious body on earth. But when I'm away from England, or when I'm at sea—well, circumstances have always been too strong for me."

"I don't know," said O'Hagan unpleasantly, "whether a gentleman with such powerful convictions as these won't want to press them upon our notice at inopportune moments."

Captain Kettle stiffened at once. "My shore convictions need be no concern of yours, sir. They were brought out entirely for the lady here. You offer £30 a month, and I take it, and will carry out my orders. I'm loyal always to the owner who pays me, and that's all a shipmaster's conscience has to trouble itself with when he's on service. If there's anything dicky, or if there's anything wrong done, that's the owner's lookout."

Burke blinked cheerfully with his glass eye.

"You're quite a theologian, Captain. Well, call that settled, then. Here are three fivers, by way of your first month's half-pay, in advance. You're at the same temperance hotel, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. If you think I ought to move to more respectable quarters, I can afford it now."

"Not at all. Great thing is to keep inconspicuous. Go and enjoy yourself for the rest of the day, Captain. I'll call upon you about 11.30 to-night."

Now the three people who remained behind in that room were conspirators who were straining every nerve to be dangerous. O'Hagan was an inventor; the sardonic Burke was a clever agitator of the underground type; and the girl, with her good birth, her magnificent beauty, her splendid voice, and her passionate eloquence, was one of those rare orators that the centuries now and then bring forth with power to win great audiences over to any cause. Ireland was their country, and a blind ecstatic hatred for England formed their motive power. But this last point they did not yet bring to the notice of Captain Owen Kettle. They preferred to have their recruits thoroughly involved before they trusted them in any way deeply.

As a cloak to their larger object Burke and Miss Ffrench addressed frothy meetings (when they could not contrive to get these suppressed by the

police), and in other ways contributed to keep up in Ireland that social atmosphere which has existed there ever since political explosives were first invented. The little O'Hagan worked as a fitter in an engineer's shop, and earned there a steady three pound ten a week.

Miss Ffrench was interviewed by the papers, had her photographs (very lovely photographs) published, and was commented upon by the public prints in varying degrees of kindness. Burke, strive though he might, could never bring himself into prominent notice without an accompanying spell of jail, which, being a man of tender tooth, he detested.

O'Hagan kept out of the public eye entirely. He was a fellow of infinite disappointments. He was a clever inventor who lacked commercial aptitude. Nine-tenths of his patents were never taken up, and the remaining tenth were stolen from him by urbane employers; and somewhat naturally he bit against fate. A chance speech of Miss Ffrench pointed out to him clearly that the other name for fate was England, and he jumped eagerly at the chance of doing that country harm. Especially did the opportunity please him, since here at last was a chance of displaying the value of his adored inventions.

To evolve from these ingredients, then, the scheme

for building a submarine torpedo boat designed to blow up the ships of the British navy, one by one, till that proud nation submitted to the sister island, was the easiest kind of effort imaginable. Getting the thing put into practical shape offered no very great difficulties. O'Hagan resigned his fitter's bench, and the income therefrom, to live on sixteen shillings a week, and take over the drawing office and oversee construction. O'Hagan bubbled with vindictive invention. Miss Ffrench addressed great meetings of the Irish with silver tongue, hinted at an enormous weapon that was being forged for England's overthrow, and drew in abundant subscriptions; and Burke, who disliked settled work, made a great display of toil, and did nothing very effectively.

Only on one point had this committee of three any difference of opinion, and that was over the site of the projected shipyard. Burke was all for America. "You can build what you like in the States," he said, "and no one will interfere. There will be no question of jail for any of us in America, and there might be here. Some one's bound to inform. Besides, we'd get heaps of subscriptions from our folks in the States, and we'd be able to live a bit better than we can here in Dublin."

"I hate America," said the girl bitterly, "and our renegade *emigrés* over there. They froth, and they

talk, and make themselves ridiculous, and in effect they do less than nothing for Ireland. I want to see the boat built here. Surely we have not sunk so low that we cannot build our own avenger in our own country?"

"Might try Harland & Wolff," said Burke, "but I doubt if they'd take on the contract. Belfast's Orange, you see."

"You laugh, but I don't see that it's at all impossible. The West Coast is lonely enough. Surely we could find some lonely island off Connemara, or County Mayo, or some great cave in the cliffs where we should be undisturbed."

"That's like they do in novels," said Burke, "but unfortunately in practice it would be impossible. You've got to get your materials from somewhere, and the steamer people would talk, let alone having to reckon with the inevitable informer against your own workpeople. The brute Government would know all about the game from the word 'go.' "

"Of course they would," said O'Hagan. "They always do, you know, although sometimes it suits them to play the thickhead and make out they don't. But do you think they'd interfere? Not a bit. They're too beastly contemptuous. Why, if we set up a works in Liverpool, and the crowd got to know, and tried to lynch us, they'd give us police protec-

tion till we'd the thing launched and were ready to proceed against them. I hate the idea of going out of Ireland. The sea makes me so horribly ill. I'd rather have an arm amputated than cross to Holyhead. But that's what it's got to be. I'm speaking as an engineer, and I tell you plainly this thing's going to be built in no amateur workshop. The States would be best. They've got the best machine tools in the world over there; but I flatly refuse to cross the Atlantic under any consideration whatever. So if you want my help—and you can't do without me—it's got to be England or nowhere."

It was this choice of a site for their building yard more than anything else which put poor needy Captain Kettle off the scent of the end to which his new employment trended. A man more aggressively patriotic it would be impossible to find, but beyond the marches of Great Britain his sympathies were narrow. He had wandered widely, and (through bitter experience) had gathered a vast dislike for other nationalities. He was one of those aggressive Islanders who would as soon fight as shake hands with any foreigner.

Once hired, Kettle was his owner's man to keep the peace or make war, entirely as orders directed, and (except for this end) he took no private conscience to sea with him. Severe critics, who for one

reason or another have no sword to sell, sneer at the trade of the mercenary, though there have been honorable men in the one occupation as in the other. But it never occurred to Captain Owen Kettle that people might criticise his actions from such an abstract standpoint, and if it had come to his knowledge the circumstance would not have ruffled him.

He was a man who cared nothing for blame from any one except an owner, and usually looked upon praise as an impertinence. He was a man doing his utmost to earn money for the present maintenance of his family and a chapel, and carrying with him the ultimate hope of returning to these, and enjoying moreover the agricultural ease of a moorland farm.

When he came to her, the submarine boat was practically finished, so far as the shore-going brain of O'Hagan could invent and design. Kettle looked her over, inside and out, with a critical eye. She was new to him, of course, entirely new, but all modern steamer sailors are, to a certain extent, engineers, and he took in her various points appreciatively.

O'Hagan escorted him round, fluttering with anxiety that he should like everything, bitter and caustic at all his objections. Here were the horizontal rudders, actuated automatically by an internal pendulum to prevent unpremeditated dives. In

these sponsons were the vertical propellers to force her under water. The water ballast tanks were here and there, with independent ejector pumps to each. These were trimming tanks. There forward was the torpedo-room, and here was the store of spare Whiteheads. The main engines were aft, three sets of them, four cylinders to each, water-cooled, explosion gas-engines all. Here were the pumps for the water circulation. Here were petrol tanks. These were the carburetters, and did the Captain think spray carburetters would act pleasantly in a sea-way?

"Don't know, sir," said Kettle. "Outside my line. Steam's all I know. It's the first time I've struck these kerosene engines, and I must say they strike me as smelly. But do I understand you to say they've all to be started by hand?"

"Of course. Of course. Here's the starting gear. It's quite simple. If you understand anything about oil engines you'd know they must be started that way."

"I've just told you I didn't. But as a navigating officer I've got to point out if I telegraphed for 'full speed' on one of the engines, while you were grinding up one of your blessed handles, we'd either be into the next ship, or knocking a hole out of the ground if there was any handy."

"Not a bit of it, Captain. Once you are under weigh, the engines are kept running continuously. When you want the propellers, they are thrown into gear with these friction clutches. The same with the diving propellers on the sponsons."

"You've got a big head, sir," said the little sailor admiringly. "I never saw so much strong machinery tied up tight into tangled knots during all my going to sea. Whether you'll ever keep it in hand, James only knows. How do you go astern?"

"These three friction clutches here. I've provisionally protected twenty-three clutches in my time, but none of them have been taken up, and I've never been able to afford the full patents. You'll find the best of them here, and they are real nailers. Some people would have used gear wheels, but I take no chances. Good clutches are dead safe."

"H'm, I don't know. If you used helical bevels, I don't think they would have been stripped. However, it is a matter of opinion. You've only worm steering, I see. Pity you couldn't give us power for that, too——," and away they went off into technicalities.

O'Hagan and Kettle alone appeared as officially connected with the building yard, and Burke and Miss Ffrench met them only under conditions of labored secrecy. "I know, Captain," the girl said

to him at the first of these mysterious gatherings, "a man like you will require no explanation of why we have to come together on the quiet like this——" she trusted that the little sailor would be ingenious enough to invent an explanation for himself, and he did it promptly.

He winked a sharp eye at her. "There's no man in England understands the Foreign Enlistment Act better than me, miss. You leave it to me, and I'll see we get the little packet snugly to sea. The English Customs people are always a bit too late when it comes to stopping anybody. I've slipped through their fingers over a job like this five times already."

Miss Ffrench bit her lip. "Then you have guessed already the flag you are asked to help."

Kettle smiled genially. He always had an eye for a pretty girl. "Why, yes, miss. Now you put it that way, I can see it clearly enough. You're an American. I ought to have guessed it at once by your Irish accent. Well, I'm not much up on foreigners as a rule, but I'm glad it's no worse. I've known some very fine accordion players come out of America, and men that knew a good hymn tune when they heard one, too."

The first performance of the submarine boat at sea made up a story of unmitigated disaster. O'Hagan, her constructor, with the horrors of *mal*

de mer always before him, flatly refused to budge from shore. The machinery was in charge of the only three engineers they could pick up, and these all proved themselves incompetent.

The antics of steam, and of steam machinery, they protested they carried at their fingers' ends; but these explosion engines were new to them, and after a first trial of their infirmities they were not disposed to make many further efforts toward understanding them. Besides, they were seasick, abominably so, and for that matter everybody else on board the little vessel was seasick also. Even that toughened veteran, Captain Kettle, suffered from this devastating ailment, and it was only by an effort of his tremendous will that he contrived to stick on at duty.

The movements of the submarine were disgusting. In a sea-way, when she was on the surface, her rolling and pitching and wallowing was intolerable. When she took a dive, as often as not she would commence matters by turning a complete somersault, stern over stem, rattling about her unfortunate crew like peas shaken in a drum.

The air for the gas engines and for breathing was officially supposed to come down two long flexible tubes, which towed outboard, and had their upper ends carried on the surface of the sea above, by

means of highly ingenious floats. That is to say, in theory and on paper the floats were highly ingenious, but in practice they sometimes dragged under altogether, whereupon the explosions in the gas engines would weaken and cease, and the human manning of the craft would gasp and think the last minute of their life had then arrived.

Under such infernal conditions, then, was this first trial trip carried out, and nothing but Captain Kettle's venomous tongue and rough handling of each individual member of his crew held the horrible little craft at sea. He kept on repeating: "Wait till you are used to her, and then she will travel all right." And as is mentioned above, he induced his crew to "wait" by methods peculiarly his own.

But human endurance has its limits, and continued seasickness under these conditions is one of the most devastating of ailments. One by one the crew relapsed into an unconsciousness from which neither beating nor vituperation would extract them, and at last the unpleasant truth was forced into Kettle's aching head, that if he didn't want his unpleasant command to become a mere derelict, he must run back forthwith to harbor.

In his subsequent meeting with his employers, considerable temper was shown on all sides. O'Hagan, as inventor, held that the boat's construc-

tion was in every way correct, and that only bad handling made her unwieldy. Kettle, white-faced and ill, promptly went through that boat piecemeal, from her lubricators to her conning tower, and belarded each point with offensive criticism.

"You want pressure lubricators, any one but a shore-living drawing-office man would have known that," and he threw sarcasm on the existing lubricators, and on a hundred other matters, in a way that made O'Hagan bubble with helpless profanity—"and don't you swear at me," he wound up. "I'm in your employ, I know, but I'm a man used to respect, and, by James, I'll have it! Besides, there's a lady present, and I value her opinion too highly to talk back at you in the way you deserve."

Burke tapped the table. "Yes, yes, yes, it's all very well, but while you're squabbling over these technicalities, it strikes me the police may be here to arrest us any minute. I've no immediate need for another spell of jail myself."

"How's that?"

"Why, the Captain here has sacked all his crew, or they've deserted, which amounts to the same thing, and perhaps you think they won't talk. I don't see how the Government can avoid getting to know."

"Talk," cried the bitter O'Hagan, "of course

they'll talk, but as for the fool Government, you needn't be scared of them. You can bet your life they've known all about us from the first word start, and they've been too beastly contemptuous to stop us. You'd have to blow up half the British Empire before their muddy brains could understand there was anything wrong."

The man was very near blurting out dangerous truths, and Captain Kettle was beginning to get startled. Miss Ffrench took the situation firmly in hand.

"Gentlemen, please, this wrangle must stop. We have all had a bitter disappointment, and Captain Kettle has undergone much physical suffering. He is the only man who has seen our boat in practical work, and his views should certainly be received with deference. I know he did not mean all the warmth of language he used in his criticisms to be taken literally. But even he does not wholly condemn the boat. He only insists on modifications which his practical experience has shown are necessary, and I am sure Mr. O'Hagan's genius will see a dozen ways past these difficulties."

The little sailor pressed a hand against his aching head.

"Thank you, miss. It's good of you to back me up like that. But I don't think the job will suit me

any further. I'm a poor man and I want money, but there's a bit too much temper shown against the British Government for my taste. Now, I'm not here to defend them; they've treated me pretty toughly one time and another; but when it comes to causing that Government pain (which it dawns upon me is what you're after), why, there I'm the wrong man to help. I'm a Britisher first, last and all the time, and it doesn't do for anybody to forget it."

The three conspirators did not dare to look at one another, but they all seemed struck with the same shiver. It was the girl who found presence of mind to promptly tackle the situation. Her voice was pleasantly sympathetic.

"My dear Captain Kettle, didn't you guess our real nationality for yourself? And I don't think, according to the latest evening paper, that America is at war with England."

"No, miss, that's a fact. I fancy Spain's giving the States all the trouble they've any use for at present."

"Ssh. It's dangerous even to whisper these things, but as you've guessed half a secret, Captain, you may have the rest. So soon as your improvements are made, and the boat is in proper sea trim, we wish you to take her down to the coast of Spain and there begin her work."

"Well, I've no special objection to that. I've a poor opinion of all Dagos anyway. But if this is to be war, I'd like to have some sort of official guarantee it's all right. You must pardon me for bringing up these business matters, miss, but I must point out to you that to every fight there's an afterwards."

Miss Ffrench smiled brightly. "You are entirely right, Captain, and I will give you the best guarantee I can think of. I will come with you myself."

"And these other gentlemen?"

"Oh, of course," said Miss Ffrench, with a desperate gaiety, "they'll come, too, as my personal escort. Now, my dear Skipper, do go off to bed. You look worn out."

It was not at the next trial, or even at the next after this, that the submarine boat behaved with anything approaching efficiency. In fact, as a sea-going craft, she always hunted for disaster so hungrily that under no circumstances could she ever become popular as a mere vehicle. No one but a man as hard-up and desperate as Captain Owen Kettle would ever have consented to stay by her after so many damping experiences of her evil qualities. But the pay was there, at the rate of £30 a month, and it was paid each week with regularity, and the poor needy man could not afford to lose it.

Finally came the day when she was reluctantly passed as fit for sea, and was ready to start off on her murderous cruise. Sheltered behind one excuse and another, up till now his three employers had always stayed ashore, but Kettle showed plainly that he was not going without them, and so they had to come with him.

Miss Ffrench joined last. She had been waiting ashore to bring off the last telegraphic news of the warship they were going to destroy, but once she came, the engines were started, Kettle gave his orders, and the uncomfortable vessel wallowed out of the river and rolled and pitched her way to sea, running on the surface, with her full freeboard.

Kettle set a course, and handed himself below to the stuffy little box of a cabin. The girl sat wedged in one corner, pale, but resolute-looking.

"All going as you could wish, Captain?"

"Well, miss, as you see yourself, she isn't exactly the Cunard for comfort, but nothing's broken down yet, or offered to. My new chief thinks he knows all about gas engines, and says at the present rate of consumption we've got enough petrol in the tanks to carry us half round the world. I will say this—it's a wonderful fuel for close stowage and bad scent. Are you sure that Spanish warship will wait in Ferrol till we get down to her?"

"The ship will be there. I've got certain information."

"I can't say I particularly like blowing up these poor wretches of Dagos. Wouldn't smashing the propellers of their vessel do as well?"

"No. The blow must be a deadly one, or half of its effect will be lost. War is war, Captain, and the heavier you can hit, the sooner it can be ended."

Captain Kettle sighed. "I don't like to see a pretty young lady like you taking up a murdering job like this. I suppose," he added sympathetically, "the gentleman you were walking out with didn't behave as he ought to have done, and that's drove you to politics. I wish I could have come across him, miss. I'd have combed his hair for him. Yes, by James!"

The voyage which followed on was one of unmitigated discomfort. The seas, as if disliking this new intruder, displayed to it their roughest humor. The boat picked up a gale in the Channel's mouth, and carried it with her down to the Bay, where it was reinforced. Inside the evil-smelling, badly ventilated hull all suffered from nausea and from chronic headache. There were no formal meals. They ate sardines and biscuits with their fingers, and everything they touched mired them with oil. Even that ultra cleanly person, Captain Kettle himself, could not keep his hands and clothing unsoiled.

But there was no doubt about it that they were warmed up to the work ahead of them, and this alone kept them up to the abominable strain. At last, however, one afternoon they rounded Cape Ortegal, and with nightfall were round Cabo Prior, and then felt their way up to the entrance of Ferrol Harbor. They ran in with the conning tower just awash, and the air tubes in action, and tugging at their floats astern. Nearer and nearer they drew. Kettle held the spokes of the steering-wheel himself, and the girl stood beside him in the tower, white and panting with excitement.

Presently, out of the night ahead, the outline of a great battleship loomed out. The girl was gripped with such a fierce excitement that it almost choked her. "That's the one, Captain. Dive now—dive, please—dive. I order you to. Do you hear, I order you!"

Kettle would have preferred to run closer. He knew the difficulty of steering a straight course under water, and had the order been given by one of his male employers he probably would have neglected it and followed his own opinion. He was never a man who cared for much interference.

But with Miss Ffrench it was different. To begin with she was a lady, and there was the item that he liked her. He issued short, crisp orders, and the

boat rocked and sank, and he steered as well as he could by gyroscope and compass. A Whitehead torpedo was in its tube forward, and Burke, with his one sound eye glaring murder, crouched in the narrow nose of the boat beside it, ready on the word to start its engines and send it forth to devastate. Captain Kettle in the tower calculated his distances and watched the dial of the log. They were only eight hundred yards away now. He would give the order to fire at one hundred and fifty.

Then softly there came to him the sound of some of the cylinders of one of the engines "cutting out," a sound which by this time he had got by heart. Then that engine—the port engine—stopped, and he had the pleasing knowledge that, in spite of a hard-ported helm, the boat was beginning to turn round in a circle.

He used all the encouraging language he could command down the voice tube, and as this had no effect, he left the useless wheel and went himself to the engines.

A very tired, white-faced engineer pointed to the damage with a spanner. "Ball-tap's jammed in the carburetter, and I can't bash it clear from outside. Take me a couple of hours to get it pulled down and fixed up right again."

"Where's O'Hagan?"

"Drugged silly, as per usual. He's—— By George, Captain, look at that! There are those two air tubes fouled and sucked under. Get us up quick out of this, or we shall stay down here for good and suffocate. There, you see, the other engines were beginning to stop before I cut off the gas. Now we shall have to sweat those blessed ballast tanks empty with the hand-pump. Who wouldn't sell a works ashore and come to sea in a submarine!"

The boat was pumped ignominiously back to the surface in this manner then, and arrived there to find itself in the middle of a blaze of radiance projected from a warship's searchlight. When the hatch was taken off, and the white strained faces came out gasping for breath, a couple of smart white picket boats steamed up, and their officers and crews had the appearance of a storming party.

But with the arrival into the light of Miss Ffrench this attitude was changed. A beautifully blushing young English sub-lieutenant saluted, and presented Captain somebody or other's compliments, and wouldn't the lady and her friends come on board and sup.

There are some invitations which it is ungracious to refuse, and others which it is unsafe to decline. Captain Kettle, sick with disgust at finding he had

been tricked into an attempt at torpedoing a British ship, was going to blurt out that they were pirates and could only come on board to be hung. But the girl interrupted him. "Please let me speak. It is the last thing I shall ever ask. And I will explain to you afterward. Just say nothing now."

So she pleasantly accepted the sub-lieutenant's offer, and while the crew of them got into his picket boat, the other picket boat took over the submarine for examination.

"We thought you were a whale," said their pink-cheeked host, "that had got touched up by somebody's propeller. I can tell you you made no end of a swirl. Nasty, stuffy things those under-water boats I should think, aren't they? Here we are at our ladder. Just excuse me a moment while I go and report to the skipper, will you?"

With dry mouths and strained faces they watched that young officer tread briskly along the lit white decks, and speak to his superior officer; and as the pair of them talked, the crew of the submarine overheard scraps here and there—possibly because they were intended to overhear them. "——Meant for us sure enough, sir——Whitehead ready in the tube. Saw it myself when she lifted——Couldn't be rough, you know, sir, because of the lady——Devilish good-looking."

"——Great thing is not to make martyrs of them, you see. So we'll just ignore the whole thing. Pass the word to the chief engineer to go and pick up all the tips he can from their infernal machine, and then scuttle her."

"——Men might talk ashore."

"——I'll stop all leave if necessary. Here, come along and introduce me to the lady."

So presently Captain Kettle, with the dazed O'Hagan, Burke the one-eyed, a defiant Miss Ffrench, and a very grimy crew, found themselves surrounded by affable naval officers, who talked on the most ordinary of topics, and utterly refused to accept the idea that there had been anything like tragedy even in the air.

. . . . . .

There had been no damage done really, and Captain Kettle had earned good wages, but he was wondering as he drank whiskey and soda in that warship's hospitable wardroom, whether he could ever forgive the injury done him by comely Miss Ffrench.

But he felt grimly pleased at the conspirators' punishment. Nothing could have wounded them more deeply than the knowledge that everything practical about their painfully made boat would henceforward be the property of the hated British Navy.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BATTLE OF THE BEES.

A BULLET splashed noisily through the soft flesh of a dusty aloe in the wayside hedge, and Captain Kettle felt the wind of it as it *whop-whopped* past his cheek. It was the fourth attempt on his life that day, and he allowed himself to use the language of irritation. Afterward, the crack of the shot came to him from the direction of a thick green cork-wood which ran unbroken up the mountain-side, till it appeared to prop the hot blue sky above.

The little sailor faced this assassin's eyrie savagely. "Fat lot of good it would do for me to go and look for one rifleman in all that timber. He'd run like a hare just as the others did if he saw me start, and I should have all my sweltering run for nothing again. They seem pretty feeble kind of skunks, these Carlists. Well, it's a fool's game for me to be standing out here in the middle of Spain to be made a cock-shy of."

Captain Owen Kettle possessed all of the old-fashioned fighting man's distaste for cowering in

cover, and he carried, moreover, the knowledge gathered from infinite experience of how many are the bullets which do not carry out their sender's intentions. But there are moments when even the bravest of men can scurry to shelter without detriment to their honor, so the sailor uttered a few further remarks derogatory to the parentage of the man who was sniping at him, and a few strong hopes against his future salvation, and then left the hot, dusty centre of the road and jumped down into a stone-lined wayside culvert.

Great ragged edges of aloes bristled above the culvert on either side. The floor and walls of it were neatly faced with stone. It was quite dry, and unpleasantly warm, and Kettle had frequently to take the perspiration from his brow with a forefinger. A little further on the aloe clumps were more than ordinarily thick, and their heavy bayonet leaves arched overhead and made a patch of shade. He considered a moment, went to this, sat down, and lit a crisp, frayed Spanish cigar to assist his meditation.

"It's a poor sort of thing, this, to suck at," he commented. "Why they dry out all the juice and flavor from their tobacco here is a crank I never could understand. It's like their preferring aguardiente to Christian whiskey. Spain's a poor sort of country anyway.

"Now, those beggars in that cork-wood will have seen me jump down into this drain and I suppose they'll imagine I'm frightened and will run. I guess they don't fancy I'm just sitting here thinking unkind things. They'll suppose I've either run forward or back, and the odds are the two ends of this road are cleverly guarded. What's more, they've seen enough of my fancy shooting not to try to hold me up with any more of their silly corporal's guards. They'll post a lot of men this time, and I don't undertake to fight through a regiment."

He licked a loose leaf of the cigar back into its place and nodded to it thoughtfully. "This trip's got to be run on patent safety lines, and that's the truth of it. Here are the dispatches in my pocket, and I said I'd carry them through ten times the trouble these greasy Carlists can give, and, by James, I'll do it! There's the pay waiting at the other end for delivery, and it's good pay, and I want it for the poor missis and the farm. I'm not here for fun. I'm not here just to tickle my dirty pride by handling a gun. I'm here for hard cash—or the best equivalent that can be got for it out of depreciated pesetas—and it will be sheer selfishness of me to forget it."

The little man sighed heavily. "I've got to put

down my own beastly nature, and have more recollection for those depending on me, and that's a fact."

It was acting on these pious resolutions, then, that Captain Kettle, after exploring the culvert for a hundred yards each way, came upon the course of a stream which fed it, and up the dry bed of this, under a shelter of foliage, retreated rapidly from the dangerous neighborhood of the cork-wood, in a direction which lay at right angles to the hot, white, dusty road which he had been originally following.

For a mile he progressed under this cover, and then, topping a rise, found himself in the open. The stream bed tipped into a little lake, now low with the drought of summer.

He had seldom seen a spot that so thoroughly pleased the eye. The water flashed and smiled at him with a million dimples. The rocks were of a warm and comely pink. Even the patch of waste ground where he stood carried for its weed crop graceful palmetto scrub.

But it was the little farm at the further side which most thoroughly appealed to him. The stout walls of the house were so delicately white; the curled tiles of the roof were so pleasantly red; the bourgainvillea which hung to one of its gables offered such exquisite purples. And then beyond were wine grapes on espaliers in full bearing, and field after field of

grain ripened under the fine Spanish sun to an entrancing yellowness. Even the dark green ilex forest at the back was musical with the sound of pigs.

He half drew paper from his pocket and a stub of pencil. Pictures like these were rare to him, and always moved him to the composition of verse. But with a sigh he put these back again, and remembered his more immediate business. The envelope he had taken from his pocket contained the precious dispatches.

But he made a compromise with himself. He required food, and might as well requisition it here. He could sit at the farmer's door, and, during the eating of a meal, might still without neglect of duty continue to feast his eye.

With this scheme in mind, he stepped jauntily down a winding path made by the pigs, avoiding with care the sharp hooks of the palmettos which were so anxious to tear his clothes. The circuit of the little lake was long, and Kettle was tempted a thousand times to stop and enjoy new vistas which were lit up so pleasantly by the generous sun. With the side of his mouth which was unoccupied by the peeling cigar, he hummed little tunes as he walked. With his fingers he drummed out the rhythm of sonnets.

The house, when he came to it, was more ample

than he had thought. It was perched on a queer little knoll of rock, which had hitherto been hidden from him by a roll of the ground, and it gave one the idea that in some remote era the site had been picked as a fortress. Here Christianity might well have discussed theological points with Islam in chain armor, with every argument punctuated with arrow-shot, and driven home by whistling battle-maces.

But there was no suggestion of the redoubt as Kettle viewed it then. The place was redolent of peace, of coolness and rustic charm.

Bees buzzed round him as he made his way up the last little steep ascent. On the low wall of the terrace, which flanked the house, straw-made hives stood in a generous row.

Laden and empty bees left their trade routes for a moment to inspect Captain Kettle as he advanced. They were a big colony, and therefore powerful and jealous. He was a stranger, and so a creature full of suspicion. It was their custom to fall with blind rage now and again on strangers whose odor and appearance pleased them not, and cause these to leave the place and return no more. They were arrogant, as befits a bee colony which is so large as to consider itself a nation.

Their only master was the farmer, who held the power of life and death over them, and was over-

lord of their hives and honey, and, in fact, treated them as he saw fit. But the farmer made no attempt to check these occasional excesses by refraining to breed from the more savage hives. He was, in a way, rather proud of them; the bees formed a hedge of defence between him and possible enemies; and he was careful always to mark and preserve the queen bees which would rear the finest fighting stock.

A swarm then of buzzing insects inspected Captain Kettle, and, though he was not exactly comfortable under the ordeal, he did not flinch, and received no hurt. It was his pride always to show an adaptability to rural circumstances.

The escort kept round him as he marched briskly across the terrace to the cloistered front of the house. An appetizing smell and the rustle of frying met his nose as he turned the angle of the house.

The cloisters were heavy and deep, and provided no lengthy view, but, under the shade of the middle one, Kettle suddenly came across a man in a split-cane rocker. The man was enormously fat, and had small, gleaming eyes which stared unwinkingly like a bird's. To him Captain Kettle made a polite bow, and passed the time of day in his best Spanish.

"Oh," said the man in English, "you're a Britisher. I was told—well, never mind what I was told. Perhaps you'd like to be rid of that halo of

my workpeople?" He flipped a fat hand backward twice, and said, "Sho!" The cloud of bees thinned. "Sho!" he said, "sho!" and the rest of the swarm buzzed away into invisibility. "And that," said he, "is the way we manage bees in Spain, Captain. We are ahead of your English methods. But I suppose bee mastery is outside your line?"

"Everything connected with a country life is of interest to me, sir, and as for ruling bees, well, as I like to be boss of everything that breathes that I'm brought in contact with, I suppose bees count in."

"Admirable sentiments," said the fat man. "Will you honor me by taking lunch? My people will contrive an excellent *tortilla,* and there is always an *olla.* As to the wine, I grow it myself and take a pride in my cellar."

Captain Kettle settled himself luxuriously on a green-painted bench. "Sir," he said pleasantly, "you have hit off to a nicety the very things I'm wanting. And may I add that you speak a very excellent English?"

"I learned it in Grand Canary, Captain. I kept a small *osteria* in Las Palmas."

"Out at the port?" inquired Kettle, with polite interest.

"No, in the town. In a street at the back of the B. and A. office, which you may recall. I see you

do not remember me. But a man who has once seen Captain Kettle, and heard his tongue, does not forget either. You used some very injurious language to me in my wine shop in Las Palmas, Captain. Padura was my name."

Captain Kettle rose stiffly to his feet. "I am sorry I cannot recall it. But that being so, you must please understand that I do not apologize. What I said once, I stick to. Under the circumstances you will not want me to stay to your meal?"

"Sit down again, Captain; I will not deprive a hungry man of his lunch, or myself of your company. I do not pay off old scores in that way." And then, as he saw that the little sailor still hesitated—"Oh, if you are afraid——"

Kettle clapped promptly down on to the bench.

The fat man, without moving in his split-cane chair, called out for Manuela, and in some local *patois* commanded her to increase the quantity for the meal. Something was said also about a certain Pepe being sent to tell Don Somebody something about an illustrious guest, of which Kettle could barely catch the drift. However, with the memory of his recent resolutions still strong on him, he made interruption.

"If you're sending for more company, Mr. Landlord, please don't do it on my account. I'm travel-

ing very private, and must be off again as soon as I've had a snack."

"Oh, pardon. If you're afraid, Captain——"

"You can send for the whole of the parish," snapped Kettle, "if you think that."

"Just like your old self," said the fat man placidly.

"I despise any one who changes."

Padura let it rest at that. He seemed singularly indisposed to promote further friction, and singularly content with existing circumstances. He did nothing to hurry along the *déjeuner*. Indeed, from the diminution of the hiss of the frying-pan, and the dying away of its heralding smell, Kettle half guessed that for some reason it had been postponed.

With difficulty the portly host got a hand into his pocket, and produced a case of dry cigars, which he passed across. "I remember how much you used to like those moist black Canary cigars, Captain. But they are not to be got in this quarter of Spain. I can only offer you my best."

"I'm sure you are very polite, Mr. Padura, and I wish I could remember you and your public at Las Palmas, but I can't, and that's a granite fact. I know you wouldn't think it to look at me, but owing to circumstances I've seen trouble in so many places up and down the world, that I can't on the spur of the moment recall all the occasions. So what I said

to you in Grand Canary, or did, must stand. But I'm glad we start fair on a level footing now. What hour did you say lunch was?"

"Presently, Captain. It is overdue now. But unpunctuality is one of the things we have to put up with here in this country."

"You have scenery to make up for it. I daresay you'll not have the society here you were accustomed to while you bar-kept in Las Palmas, but the scenery round this spot makes up for all. I could sit and make poetry over it by the hour together."

The fat man's bird's eyes glittered still more brightly. "You still turn out verse, then? I remember they said you were great at it before. I remember your concertina playing myself."

"Accordion playing it was," Kettle corrected civilly. "I really wish I could recall the circumstances of our scrap. By the way, Mr. Padura, did I get to handling you out there, or is it only a mouthful of hard words you've got to complain of?"

"I leave it to your memory," said the fat man with the least possible shrug. "Here comes the lunch. If you can stand full-flavored oil, I think you will commend the omelette."

Kettle sniffed. "I'm sure I shall. It's the same old smell. I learned to like my cooking done with

rancid oil at the other Palma in Majorca. Excuse me a moment——" He shut his eyes and said a grace.

"You English," said his host, "are a surprising nation."

"That, Mr. Padura, is the grace used by the Wharfedale Particular Methodists, of which sect I am the founder. I composed the grace myself, and if you ask me I will write you out a copy. It's a grace that can be said over any meal. Whether you like the grub or not, you can always be thankful that it is no worse: that's where true piety comes in."

The meal lingered in its courses. It was served by the comely Manuela on a small round table which she brought out into the cloisters, and set between them. Whenever a bee came near her Manuela put down suddenly whatever she carried in her hand and tucked her skirts round her ankles till the creature buzzed away. This, as well as the slowness of the cooking arrangements, tended to hinder matters.

In the long waits between the dishes Padura nibbled olives, sipped wine, and talked placidly on the virtues of each. Captain Kettle fidgeted. He wished to tread once more along his journey. The dispatches had been given him in Ferrol with instructions to hurry. He had guaranteed quick de-

livery. He wanted badly to receive the pay which would be due to him at the other end.

The dispatches had been intrusted to him under peculiar conditions. He had made his arrival in Ferrol under very remarkable circumstances. As a recognition of one of his exploits there, he might well have been shot or strung up to the modern equivalent of a warship's yard-arm. But, instead, he had been most civilly treated, and had thereafter been set ashore with many ironic expressions of goodwill by some of Her Britannic Majesty's naval officers.

A period of financial depression followed, and lo, one of these same officers came to his relief. A messenger was wanted, it appeared, by the Spanish Government, to carry a very important letter through the Carlist lines to a body of Government troops, whose lines lay at the further side of the Asturias. The country between was frankly owned to be in a state of revolution. Telegraph wires were cut or tapped; the railway line was blown up in a dozen places; and the ordinary postal arrangements were wiped away into chaos. There was nothing for it but to send the letter by hand.

There was not the least chance (so said those who offered the employment) of a Spaniard slipping through the cordon. But a Britisher, if he was sufficiently determined, could get across unquestioned,

as the Carlists favored that extraordinary nation for selfish reasons of their own.

When the question of determination was raised, Kettle took over the job with uncivil promptness. He wanted to thank the British naval man for giving him a "chance of showing these Dagos how we do things," but that officer drily refused to accept his gratitude; and when the spruce little mariner started off on his journey, he took leave of all those concerned in sending him with a good deal of stiffness.

His course had been roughly mapped for him, and he had followed it (as has been recorded above) through some peril, and though he did not happen to know it, he had left the main road only to march into what were but the day before Carlist headquarters.

Captain Owen Kettle was a man always on the alert, and one also who could change from the easy seat of peace into active and aggressive war with incredible swiftness. He was suspicious, moreover, of Padura from the very first mention of that mysterious "trouble" in the wineshop in Las Palmas. He had too much self-pride to make an early retreat, but at the same time he was keenly alive to the advent of possible danger.

The meal dragged its way slowly through sev-

eral courses. *Baccalhao* followed the omelette, fragrant of anything but the sea. Then the *olla* came, exhaling garlic, suspicious in composition, powerful in seasoning, and Captain Kettle wiped his knife and fork on a crust, and attacked a plateful with gusto. Thereafter, at intervals, Manuela brought them a roasted chicken, polenta with caramel sauce, and cheese, and over each course she made at least three false starts, and stopped to tuck her skirts tightly round her ankles through fear of her enemies the bees.

Kettle did well by the meal all through, gave every eulogy to the wine, and drank a bottle of it; and then at the conclusion, feeling pleasantly replete, he said another elaborate grace, and lifted his head from his hands, and words of thanks and farewell ready on his tongue. But a glance at his fat host kept these back. Padura was struggling to his feet, and was obviously disturbed.

"Hullo!" said Kettle, "what's broke?"

Padura broke into a little cackle of laughter.

"The cigars," he gasped breathlessly. "The Canary cigars! I have a box of them inside—fine, black, moist ones that you'll just love. And I was going to let you go off without tapping them. Hind-leg-of-a-saint! What forgetfulness!"

He shuffled clumsily across the cloister toward

the heavy oaken house door, and Kettle watched him with a puckered brow.

"There's more than full-flavored cigars in your mind just now, my man," he muttered. "I wish I could remember something about that row in Las Palmas. Perhaps that will help me to see the bottom of things. By James, what do you mean by that now?"

Padura had passed through the door into the house, had slammed it after him, and Kettle heard the snap of shooting bolts. At the same time another sound fell upon his ear—a sound that was quiet and persistent, a sound that he had got to know by heart during the last two days he had been on the road with these dangerous dispatches. It was the soft pad-pad of rope-soled sandals, not of one pair, either, but of many.

He stepped out into the open sunshine. A company of thirty ragged soldiers had come out from the ilexes, and were fixing bayonets to their rifles as they marched. They were heading for the path up to the terrace. "Now, this," Kettle remarked to himself, with grim appreciation of the trap, "this is Mr. Padura's idea of hitting back. These are the Don Somebodys he told Manuela to send Pepe for. Well, I can't get at Padura just now, because of the front door, and I suppose he's due for something

over that old row I can't remember; but it will rile me badly if I don't contrive to twist his tail by way of receipt. In the meanwhile, good-by to this farmhouse. I'm taking no extra risks this trip."

He started off at a quick run round the buildings to look for another path down to the cultivated plain below, and by the time he had made the circuit, found to his disgust that the road by which he had entered was the only one for departure. The face of the cliff on which the house stood varied in height from sixty feet to, at the lowest, twenty-five, and he could come across neither ladder, rope nor spar to help an escalade. Already the soldiers were coming up the winding path, and shouting and making suggestive movements with their weapons as they caught sight of him.

To most people it would have seemed a moment for surrender. But Captain Kettle was a man of resource. A thought came to him, and he ran across the terrace toward the house, and out of the soldiers' range of vision. Then, crouching, he went back again, and stooped behind the parapet till they were just below him. Then, with infinitely quick sweeps of both arms, he sent the straw beehives toppling over on to the troops, half a dozen at a time, and then——he very hurriedly left. Captain Kettle was

fond of a fight, but he was no man to battle against infuriated bees.

He left these small venomous fighters to do their vengeance on the soldiers, and, judging from the yells and squeals and language that came up, and the buzzing which spread through it all like the diapason of an organ, they smote and spared not.

"Now for a rope or spar to help me down," thought Kettle, and ran away and began to hunt among the outbuildings for these, or substitutes for them, with frantic haste.

He searched a reeking wine-press, he searched the honey store; in the dark he blundered into a place where the corpses of swine lay in the usual embalming mixture, and shuddered in spite of his hurry as his fingers swept the cold, clammy flesh. In the torment of bees behind him the soldiers were still shouting and screaming, and presently an angry, vicious buzz or two round his own head, warned him that the petard he had launched was very uncontrollable, and still effective.

"I must go and get what I want in the house," he told himself, "and then clear out, or else these small warriors will leave the soldiers and start in to eat me up next."

He ran from the outbuildings and sprinted round the house till he found a place where a wooden spout

jutted from the wall. With a run he got a hand on to this, and quickly craned himself on to it. More bees were coming up to hasten his movements. He stood on the spout, balancing himself by outstretched palms on the wall, and when he was erect, he could just reach the coping above.

He scrambled quickly on to this, and ran across the flat, concrete roof. The bees were whirling round him in a crowd now, and from two or three he got fiery stings. A door stood before him invitingly. He snatched it open, jumped through on to the head of a stairs, and slammed the door behind him.

Simultaneously with the slam of the door, some one shot at him from below. The bullet missed its mark completely, but brought down a great slab of plaster and whitewash, which sent the little sailor into a fit of coughing and choking. His own revolver, that inseparable companion, was out on the instant, and he charged down the stairs; but what with eyes that were dazzled with the brightness of a Spanish mid-day sun outside, the present darkness of the stairs, and the billowing clouds of dust and smoke, he made a very bad judgment of direction, and went smash into a blank wall, where the stair turned at right angles.

A lumbering step made itself heard beneath him.

"That's Padura," Kettle commented, as he pulled himself together. "I'd like to know exactly what I did to him that time in Las Palmas. He doesn't seem satisfied that he's scored sufficiently even yet."

He ran on again down the stairs as soon as he had got his direction, but he did not come across the fat man. The house was old and big, and it was full of doors and passages, and the number of its rooms was bewildering. It was a perfect warren of a place. Kettle searched it and searched it, listening for sounds, peering quickly round corners, and with pistol always ready for quickest shooting. But he found neither Padura, nor a rope, nor anything that by ingenuity could be made into a rope which would help him down the cliffs.

Manuela he did certainly come across, seated in a kitchen chair with skirts drawn tightly round her ankles and her apron up over her head and hands. She might have looked to the uninitiated like the trussed and mutilated victim of some outrage; but Kettle knew better than this.

He asked sharply for the whereabouts of the *patron,* and Manuela replied with calmness that she didn't know a bit, and would the *señor* kindly tell her if there was such a thing as a bee just then in the *cocina.*

"I'm too busy just now to look, my lass," he said

drily, "so you just keep your head wrapped up, and as likely as not it will save you from damage. Are there no more residents to this interesting house but just you and the boss?"

"There is Pepe, of course," said the muffled handmaid, "but he went off for an errand, and he hasn't returned."

"H'm,' said Kettle, "I rather fancy Pepe has returned and brought along the errand with him. I only hope those blamed bees have not recognized Pepe as a friend and been easy with him. Well, good-by, Manuela, I'm too busy to stand here making light talk."

He turned away, and once more ransacked every corner of the rambling house for Padura and for a rope. The place was bare enough. A few straw-bottomed chairs and abundance of whitewash made up the furniture of most of the rooms; only three contained beds; and nowhere could he find a cranny where even a rope could lie hidden, much less such an ample bulk as the Señor Padura. Captain Kettle was getting annoyed. He hated to be beaten.

It occurred to him to look out from one of the grilled upper windows, and what he saw there disquieted him further. The troops had given up trying to storm the rock in the face of its bee defenders, and had withdrawn to a distance. Others had come

to their help, and the place was now so ringed round that to climb down the cliff side in daylight would be merely to offer oneself as a target for thirty rifles.

A tall, thin, eye-glassed man on horseback had joined the main body, and seemed to be directing operations. The men were busy with something just inside the edge of the ilex wood.

Presently thin streams of smoke arose from that quarter, and then the soldiers again came out into the open, each with rifle in one hand and a smoking, sputtering torch in the other. Kettle watched them advance between the yellow fields of Padura's grain, till they were eclipsed from his view by the angle of the cliff, and he began to recognize that he was in a very awkward position. There was nothing for it but to stay where he was and take his chance; to attempt an escape could only mean being shot down at long range without chance of retaliation; final terms would have to be a matter of arrangement.

But, even in these ugly circumstances, Captain Kettle's loyalty to his employers—or his personal pride—were still uppermost. Whatever happened to himself, he had no mind that the dispatches should fall into Carlist hands. He peered about him for a while anxiously, and then, spying a roof-beam which had warped away from the concrete flooring

above, he balanced two chairs one on the other, and stood on the uppermost, and slipped the precious envelope into the gap.

"And now, you beggars," quoth he, as he dragged the chairs back again to the flanks of the room, "I've diddled you that much, anyway, and what I've got to see to now is, first, that you don't shoot me out of hand; and, second, that you don't torture me to get them. Torture!" he repeated to himself. "By James, no! I must see it doesn't come to that. And they're equal to it, the brutes, so I've heard. If there's a doubt on the matter, I must just peg out—scrapping."

The advance of the troops this time was unopposed by either man or insect, and presently fierce faces and rifle muzzles were peering in between the bars of the lower windows. But these were too strong for easy displacement, and a great beam was fetched from the wine-press, and with it the oaken front door was battered from its hinges. Then a gush of bayonets, with savage men behind them, swept into the house, and sent through all the rooms and stairways the din of their shouts and the reek from their smoking torches.

Kettle sat in an upper room smoking the last cigar he had in his pocket, and waiting upon events. He wished the invaders to get the first edge off their

tempers before he engaged their attention. He could hear the pad-pad of their rope-soled sandals all over the house. He could smell also a scent of warm humanity and garlic which seemed to make their presence very real.

But as has been said, the house was large and rambling, and the way to many of its rooms was not easy to find. Kettle heard the soft pad-paddings and the blows of searching gun-butts on three sides of him, and also above and below; but for fully half an hour he sat and smoked undisturbed. Then a man came into his room, saw him, started, and tried to get his bayonet to the charge. But Kettle was upon him before he could do this, and had crammed a revolver muzzle against his throat.

"*El Ingles,*" stuttered the man.

"An Englishman," corrected Kettle civilly, "and one that requires decent treatment."

The man dropped his rifle, as though to show pacific intentions, and turned his head and bawled through the doorway: "*El Ingles, acqui!*"

"Better tell your friends not to try any tricks," suggested Kettle, "or your mother's son will only be a dead hero." But the fellow seemed satisfied, and made no further struggle; and presently up came the tall, lean officer who had been riding the horse.

He settled his eyeglass, and looked at Kettle's small, spare form with obvious surprise.

"So you're the man who's been setting the countryside a-boil, are you?"

"You flatter me, General."

"I heard you'd left Ferrol."

"Most of Spain seems to have been let into that secret."

"Pff! Well, give me your dispatches, man."

"Not one look. They're hidden where you'll not find them, so you'd better take things easy and not try. It was to General Dupont I was paid to take them, and it's to him they're going, or to no one."

The tall man laughed. "May I ask whom you take me for?"

"The Carlist boss, I suppose."

The tall man laughed again. "A fellow named Pepe made the same mistake. We'd taken a Carlist camp up at the back there this morning, and were occupying it. He thought we were the rebels, and invited us here. Well, we have strung up Mr. Pepe, but we accepted his invitation all the same, and a rough time some of my fellows had of it. I wish I could catch the ruffian who capsized those beehives."

Kettle made no interruption. His pride urged

him to claim credit for the strategy, but his new prudence forced him to hold his tongue.

"However, we came in here at last, and found the bulky ruffian who owns the place——"

"By James, did you now? I've looked for that man all through the old barrack myself. I've an account to square up with him."

"Then you didn't look in the right place. There's a well in the floor of the kitchen here, and the fellow was in the well. There was a maid-servant sitting on the top of the trap-door. However, we soon had him out of that, and I'm afraid we've anticipated your private vengeance. The man's, as you English say, expended."

"Dash!" said Kettle thoughtfully, "and I've got something very particular to ask him."

"I'm sorry, but I couldn't know that or I'd have waited. As it is——" the tall man waved an explanatory palm and dropped his eye-glass on to the end of its string. "And now you may as well give me those dispatches, as there seems no chance of your carrying them further. I am General Dupont."

But Kettle's mind was not yet rid of all its suspicions. "I'm sorry, sir," he said doggedly, "but I've only your word for it that you are the gentleman you say you are. I'm taking no risks. Confidence-trick men are as thick as wayside aloes in

this country, and I understand my responsibilities. General Dupont is said to be in Hijola, and that's where I'm taking him the letter."

"As you please. It's hard, perhaps, to have to say it to you, but the dispatches were intended to fall into Carlist hands, and to me they are valueless." He went to the grilled window and shouted down—"Hola, you men, what is my name?"

"General Dupont," came the reply from twenty lips in varying tones of surprise.

"Then I have been made a common tool of?" snapped the little sailor.

"I suppose you have been paid," said the general, rather more coldly.

Kettle climbed up and got the envelope from under the beam. "That puts me on to the ground floor at once. I have not been paid. The letter is marked 'cash on delivery,' and I will trouble you for three hundred pesetas. Your clever friends in Ferrol measured me with their own tape, and I've shown myself a bit too big for them, that's all. If they'd told me what they wanted done, they should have had it. But as it is, their little game's failed, and you've got to pay for it all the same. I'll trouble you for cash, please, at your early convenience. I've business to attend to further on in this sweet country, and at the same time I'm free to tell you flat

that the neighborhood you happen to be in offends my personal taste."

"I will see that you have the money at once," said the General curtly, and turned on his heel.

Ten minutes afterward Kettle was leaving the farm, with the notes in his pocket, and another lit cigar crumbling in the corner of his mouth. His eye wandered over the cornfields and the pink boulders, and the pleasantly dimpled lake. His ear listened appreciatively to the pigs which rooted among the ilexes. But his thoughts were still back in the white farmhouse on the top of the knoll. "I'd give a lot," he muttered to himself, "to know what I really said to the late Padura in his *osteria* at Las Palmas. I wonder if I used my hands to him as well as talked. But it will be all guessing now. I don't suppose I shall ever really know for sure."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FRYING-PAN.

Mr. McTodd took a piece of wet cotton waste from his pocket and held it over the charcoal *brazero* to dry. "Fancy meeting you again," he repeated.

"You've said that twenty times already," said Captain Kettle ungraciously. "Try and think of something new."

"I will, man, I will. Don't hustle me. I'm in a very nervous and exhausted state, and need nutriment. Pass the jimmyjohn. This sour blue wine's poor tipple for a throat of my strength; but it's better than Atlantic seawater, anyway. And the aguardiente is done. You don't think your credit is good enough to get us another bottle of aguardiente, Skipper? Come now, one bottle among nine of us?"

"You'll have no more, Mac, and I'm telling you that for the tenth time at least. I asked you to think of something new?"

"Weel, man," said the engineer, "I'll give ye an observation. Here's me, come new out of the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, with a boatload of the

things they call sailors and firemen in England; and here's you, in a little, single cylinder, low pressure, small tonnage Spanish seaport town. We come together by an accident we'd call a lie if we heard it sung about in a music-hall, and I must say I'm not pleased to see you. I'm no' a man o' what ye might call much commercial aptitude mysel'; but when I've been in your company, and that's more times now than one or two, there's always been bad luck and tight belts to follow. There's humor in the situation if ye look at it rightly."

"Don't associate yourself with me, if you please, Mr. McTodd. I've handled you before, you dissolute mechanic, and we know who's the better man; but, by James, if you've forgotten, just mention it again, and I'll teach you afresh. Otherwise, please remember I'm going to have the respect that's due to me."

"Well," said McTodd briskly, "that's an invitation ye don't catch me saying 'no' to. But, man, of the 'all-in' variety, ye're a bonny fighter, and I'd like to do justice to ye. To-night I'm suffering from the effects of exposure and privation, and the poor blue ink in this jimmyjohn does me very little material good. I'm cold, too, and starved. I wish they'd a stove or a fire in this public, or a nice hot steam-pipe to dry one's clothes on. A bit charcoal dish like

that on the floor is sheer ridiculousness for a man of my measurements."

"I've done my best for you."

"Man, I'm no' grumbling at that part of your hospitality. When I take myself off to bed presently—and the jimmyjohn's nearly done—the blankets will dry my clothes fine, and by morning, after a bite of breakfast, and a wee dram just to ward off the malaria, I'll be ready for the scrap, either here among the furniture, or outside in the street, just as you please."

With an effort, Kettle bit down his temper. "The sea's spit you out, Mr. McTodd, and I'm not surprised at it. Even the Atlantic Ocean is too nice in its tastes to swallow all that's offered to it. I'll leave you over till to-morrow morning, and if you're not civil then, I'll break you up in a style that will astonish you." He turned and faced the rest of the men with a glow of anger. "And if the rest of you swine who sit sniggering there care to chip in, I'll break you up, too, without extra charge. Just remember this, you scum: There's not a man living I allow to laugh at me, and whether I happen to be at sea, or ashore at a *fonda* in Spain, that makes no difference. So take that in your ugly mouths and chew on it."

The little sailor waited for retorts, but got none.

There was something in that lean, savage face of his which forbade liberties. But he did not stay longer in the room. After this reasonable wait, to prove that he was not afraid of the lot of them together, he pushed open the door against the wind, went out into the cobbled street, and shut the door behind him.

The night overhead was bright with wind-blown stars, and through the narrow streets a fine patter of sand blew from the dunes beyond the harbor. The gale had scared away the garlic smell, and had left in its place a taint of salt and seaweed, just then most savory to Kettle's nostrils. His last disastrous months had been spent up-country in Spain, in the vain attempt to extort employment either from the Government agents or from the Carlists. In his final desperate, financial straits the sea, in some mysterious way, had dragged him back to herself, and in his then mood the atmosphere of even this small coast village came to him as a pleasant tonic.

He walked down on to the beach, and stood under the lee of a green-painted fishing felucca. He lifted up his face to the dying gale, and sniffed it appreciatively. "Same old smell," he commented. "Well, I've tasted you many a time, but you're good to get back to. After these beastly Dagos, anything is better." He turned and shook a savage fist at the

vague outline of the hills behind the village, beyond which lay the rest of Spain. "By James, if only I saw a chance of getting another job at sea!"

He faced the wind again, and watched on the water the dim green lights going north, and the dim red lights working south, each with a bright white light carried unwinkingly above it. The beach there lay alongside the steam lane between Ushant and the Straits, and the revolving light on the headland beyond was one of the many marks which vessels bound for the Mediterranean or the Canal pick up on their way from Ushant or the Bay ports. Each pair of lights represented a steamer, and each steamer (as poor Kettle woefully calculated) carried a master earning decent pay and occupying a respectable position. As to qualifications, he was as competent as any of them, and yet he stood on that strip of wind-swept sand out of employ, and without the least hope or prospect that any one would again hire him. He was a man utterly without interest. Indeed, in many quarters he had but to mention his name, and people were only too anxious to pass on the fact that he had been irrevocably blacklisted. By reason of very pressing domestic calls, too, he was a man just then who most strongly needed money.

For an hour he stood in the lee of that green-

painted boat, cursing fate; and then a different mood came over him. He remembered that at home he was the leader, yes, and the founder of a sect. In a lonely pulpit in a Yorkshire valley he had preached resignation to the Divine will and a full belief in the tenets of the Wharfedale Particular Methodists. Among these last was the axiom that everything comes to those who pray, if only the prayer be sent upward with sufficient vigor.

There and then he lifted up a hand, and with tight-shut eyes faced the dark and windy skies.

. . . . . .

The supplication was earnest, and it was long. Then, again the little sailor opened his eyes and faced the laborious sea. But this time it was with a robust faith.

He saw something out of the common, certainly, but it did not at first seem to promise either extravagant fortune, or even modest employ.

A steamer was heading in for the land, spitting an occasional flame, and glowing with rosy smoke. Every minute a rocket spouted from her, climbed up into the sky, and cracked into stars. All the time her siren boomed out in a husky baritone.

"Badly on fire," commented Kettle, "and can't get it under. They've made fast the whistle-string to the bridge-rail, and the captain's wondering

whether he will have to leave her. I wonder where I come in?"

The steamer drew nearer, and more near, and so far no one on the beach or in the little town seemed to have sighted her. Captain Kettle watched her with an eye of personal interest. "Seems to be on fire aft, and by the queer way she's steaming I should say she'd caught in the bunkers as well. What in thunder are they squalling for? They don't exactly think this village has a steam fire-float, I suppose, which will go out and swamp the blaze for them. Or is it that there's no one in charge? Is her captain ill or dead, and does she want another? Is that what she has been sent here for?" He reverently touched his cap—"I must go off and see."

At a run he set out back for the village, and presently was beating against the door of the *fonda* from which he had recently emerged. An indignant landlord presently opened to him—a man who only wished he could screw up courage just then for impudence.

Him Kettle pushed aside, and with a vigorous shoe applied himself to waking Mr. McTodd from his beauty sleep on the floor.

The engineer was not the safest person in the world to tackle just then. Wake he certainly did, and that with promptness, but the only thing which

had arrived to his somewhat bemused brain was the fact that some one was attacking him; and so without rising from the floor he seized a chair by the leg, and used it with considerable vigor as a flail.

The ensuing crash and row aroused the rest of the men, and they, after the manner of their profession, were doing their best to take sides in the argument. But Kettle's tongue by this time had brought Mr. McTodd to his senses, and he thereupon sat up, and threw the balance of his chair in among his friends, with instructions to keep the peace.

"I'm no' just ready for yon scrap, Skipper, if that's what ye've come for. But if you call me a dissolute mechanic again, I'll get up before we're any older, and take my feet to you."

"I want you to rouse and come out, if you're not too drunk."

"Drunk! Me drunk! Man, must I keep on referring to your inhospitality? Sour blue ink such as they give here has no power to make a man with my coefficient of absorption even wutty. Moreover, we'd only a jimmyjohn of it, and if all hands didn't share equally, at least they can say they had as much as I thought was good for them. Ye'll ken, Skipper, with this poor blue ink——"

"Rouse, you swine, and pick the sleep out of your

ears. Can't you hear that whistle? There's a steamboat inshore, blowing for all she's worth, and shooting rockets. She's on fire, and well lit, and she wants help badly, and no one else seems inclined to give it."

The engineer jumped sharply to his feet. "There's our boat and us. Of course, the blessed Dagos in the village are all shamming sleep, in case they should be called upon to help. Come along, Skipper. Why couldn't you have said at once what was wanted, instead of starting off on the preach and wasting time?"

A gesticulating landlord, shrieking for the payment of his bill, was swept away from the door, and ten men (of seven different nationalities) scrambled into the night. They ran out through the narrow streets on to the beach, Kettle leading, McTodd stumbling along in the rear, and throwing stones at the innkeeper when he came within range.

The lifeboat in which Mr. McTodd and his companions had made their arrival from the vague Atlantic twelve hours before, lay there hauled up, and the thrifty Spaniards had looted her of all movable stores. But the returning crew were not particular or over-nice. They visited the fishing feluccas within reach, and gleaned all the oars and thole pins they wanted. Then they ran the boat down into the

surf, and half of them waded to their necks to get her out.

Before them, lit by the light of her own burning, the steamer shouldered over the Atlantic rollers. But the roar of her siren was growing more faint, and McTodd, who was tugging at the stroke oar, with his head over his shoulder, soon diagnosed her case.

"They've been driven from the engine-room, and steam's run down, and she's out of command. She's on fire in the bunkers. Lift your nose, Captain, and smell that roasting coal. My whiskers, but she stinks just like a gas-house."

"They've let one boat catch," said Kettle, "and she's flaming away there in the davits. They've tried lowering the other, and she's gone down one end first, and swamped alongside. Rotten tackle, I guess, never renewed since she went to sea. Same old usual. By James! look at them dancing about there like a lot of monkeys on a hot stove lid. What sort of a putty man's skipper there? Does he pride himself on keeping no discipline?"

The boat, rowed strongly against wind and sea, closed at last with the burning steamer, and Kettle rounded her up against the quarter. A rope was thrown, and the bowman caught it, and took a turn, and she hung there in comparatively smooth water,

as the steamer had fallen off into the trough, and made a lee. The frightened men above were all for jumping down to her at once, but Kettle, with the tiller out and over his shoulder, threatened to brain the first that came over the side, and the sight of the savage little face under the fire glare held them back. Then, tucking the tiller inside his coat, he caught another rope, jumped over, clapped his feet against the plating, and ran nimbly up to the rail, and stepped over on deck.

McTodd followed him, and the pair of them went coolly round and made inspection for themselves. Officers and crew of the burning steamer pressed round them, clamoring wildly; but after one had received McTodd's grimy, heavy, sledge-hammer fist in the jaw, without further explanation, there was no more hustling. As for Kettle, his savage face and the heavy tiller in his hand scared them all away from him with full completeness.

The pair of them made their leisurely inspection to the accompaniment of hissing water, booming wind, the roar of flame and the chatter of southern tongues, and then said McTodd: "Not much trouble dousing this small splutter, anyway, Skipper."

"You shut your blighted head," came the surprising retort. "Every living soul has got to leave this old packet within the next three minutes."

"But, man, do ye no' think of the salvage? As a spectacle, I'll admit she makes a surprising fine bonfire, though I'm ower sober to appreciate it. But if she's put out, it'll mean a fine large sum to us. Man, Kettle, if you're thinking these Dagos will pay for ferriage ashore, you're wrong. They'll no' fork out saxpence. And if you're thinking there's more easy time to be had ashore, you're wrong again there. I'm thinking our credit is exhausted at the pub., and I have it in mind that I broke the landlord's head with the last stone I fired at the beggar."

Kettle lifted the tiller and rushed. "By James, don't you try to keep me here haggling for your dirty saxpences! Into the boat with you, Mr. McTodd, and do your duty. By James, if you're asking me for a broken skull, you shall have one while you wait. Into the boat with you, and send down the rest of the scum first."

"Whiskers take the saxpences," said the engineer unpleasantly. "Don't you keep on flinging that in my face just because I'm Scottish. If you want to do the job for nothing, I'm the man to help you——" with which he drove the steamer's crew before him, and then down into the dancing lifeboat.

In the meanwhile Kettle, during the moment's respite, ran forward; and from the bows came the splash of an anchor, and the heavy roar of a cable

rasping through a hawse-pipe. Then, with a jar it stopped, and the other noises drowned all comment.

Captain Kettle came flying down the rope, the last man into the boat, and the bow fast to which she rode was cast off. The next sea spurned her away, and once more her oars straddled out, and before the wind she swept away quickly for the beach.

She was heavy with men, and in the landing through the surf, partly swamped. But those from the steamer were quickly hustled out with small concern about their convenience, and the boat was hauled higher up on the beach.

"Now, then," Kettle shouted through the gale, "rock out the water."

"Water be beggared!" retorted McTodd. "Let her rot."

"She may rot as she chooses, once she's carried us back to that steamboat."

"What's that, man?"

"A deserted ship, Mr. McTodd, is worth to the salvors just eight times what a ship with men on her is worth. Now I should say that steamboat footed up to all of £50,000 when she left port, and if her cargo was valuable she might very well have touched £100,000. Did you think I was a fool?"

Mr. McTodd rubbed his scrubby beard, and then

(as the idea came to him) burst into a cackle of laughter. "Oh, humorous, very humorous. Skipper, you're a great man. I take back what I said about being Scotch. Ye're as bad as a Dundee man at heart, and nearly as bad as an Aberdonian, and I love you for it. When it comes to that scrap of ours I'll deal lightly with you. Here, you coal heavers, get the water kicked out of that boat quick, or you'll have me to converse with next. That's our steamer over there, and we don't want her more badly burned than necessary."

The crew, who were not all of them English speakers, did not at first understand this new change of front, but neither Captain Owen Kettle nor Mr. Neil Angus McTodd was accustomed to waste breath in lengthy explanations to their underlings. The art of "driving" was one in which they both excelled, and presently the lifeboat lurched and reared again out through the surf, and was rowed out over the ugly seas to the steamer.

This time the matter of boarding was more difficult. The vessel had swung to her anchor, and lay pitching violently head-on to the seas. But Kettle drove the boat remorselessly alongside, and she was made fast, though at every heave the steamer threatened to come down bodily on the top of her. However, the men jumped as she rose, and once they

were over the rail, the lifeboat was passed astern at the end of a long painter to plunge as violently as she chose.

Truth to tell, with the exception of Kettle and McTodd, they were all pleased enough to have the boat within reach. The steamer was a sufficiently terrifying spectacle; she roared with flame and vomited sickening smoke; she buckled and shimmered with heat; it seemed as though she might drop in pieces and founder any second. She had scared off her Spanish crew already, and the rank and file of the newcomers openly sympathized with them. There were only two English speakers among these. One expressed his dislike for a something "tea-party on the top of a very red blast furnace," and his exact words were pungent. The other said he didn't care where he went to when he died now, as the hot place couldn't be worse than this. From the rest came similar sentiments in different tongues. But for awhile they were allowed leisure to exchange these comments, and translate them for mutual benefit as well as they were able.

Kettle and McTodd were gasping and choking on the top platform of the engine-room. The technical man explained things.

"Steam's down, you see, Skipper, and so we can't have the pumps. You can hear by the slop and by

the way she rolls she's half full of water already. The clumsy fools have let it get into the stokehold, and likely enough it's over the fire-bars this minute, and it's that that's chilled the boilers."

"*P-f-f-f!* No man could live down in that stokehold now in this heat."

"It's a matter of opeenion, and perhaps for demonstration. A fireman, and the engineer that drives him, is no' a man; he's a machine, or it should be his pride to make himself such, and rise superior to the effects of temperature. It's that, Skipper, that makes some of the profession suffer from a distressing thirst."

"We'll drop politics of that description, if you please, Mac. This steamboat has been sent directly for our benefit; we've got her all to ourselves; and it's our job to make her useful. At present she's neither more nor less than a bally frying-pan, without immediate commercial value, and very uncomfortable to live upon. Now, I'd an idea when we boarded her first that we could open a seacock and let her partly fill, and get rid of the fire that way. The blaze seemed to me low down. But that's out of the question. The seacocks will be down below there, and there's no getting at them through that heat and reek. There are no pumps on deck, of course. I see nothing for it but buckets."

"Weel, man, if that's as far as your intellect takes you, get your buckets rigged. But we've a saying in Ballindrochater, which is where I came from—my father was meenister there; I don't know whether I ever told you—we'd a saying that at a pinch a highly trained man was worth ten amateurs, and that's where I come in. They've a donkey boiler here at the far side of the fiddley, which a man can fire without being melted, and there'll be a pump attached to that which I think I can rig. So once you've got your bucket chain in action, get your hoses passed, and stand by for further results."

They separated at this, and went coughing through the smoke toward their various employments. By a happy chance the steamer was comparatively modern, and was, in fact, a typical small cargo tramp. She was steel built throughout—steel decks, steel masts, steel deck-houses. The few scraps of wood in her composition—forward of midships—had charred, caught and flared away before her Spanish crew left her, and when Captain Kettle and his companions took her over, she was a mere box of glowing metal.

The seas outside hissed against her, and from her flanks, every time she rolled them under, arose a vast cloud of spluttering steam. Her decks, which were for the most part free from water, glowed with

a dull-red heat, and a passage fore and aft was only obtained by a precarious climb along her bulwark rail.

Buckets, as it turned out, were not procurable, but sailor men have ingenuity, and vessels which would carry water were quickly contrived and found.

The most pressing need for the moment was the preservation of the fore hatch. The bunkers attended to themselves, but the worst of the cargo fire was below this, and if once the hatch covers were burnt off, the air would get in bodily, and the place would become a mere furnace. So Kettle rigged a derrick on to the rail to serve as a bridge across the glowing deck, and set his men to pour water on to this hatch. The ventilators to this hold had been burnt off, and the Spanish crew had made no effort to replace them, and, as a consequence, air got in through the gaps, and kept the blaze merrily alight.

Kettle's most difficult task was to plug these apertures. At first sight it seemed that he had no materials to do it with, and a red-hot deck to work upon; but the resourcefulness of the man was at its best just then. He looked upon this steamer as a special gift to him in answer to that fervid supplication of his on the beach, and he was straining every nerve and every fibre of his brain to prove himself worthy of the boon. Sometimes alone, sometimes

with McTodd to help him, he kicked, and tore, and dismantled, till he had gathered enough metal work for the purpose, and then, slung in the bight of a rope above the red-hot deck, he fitted the covers in place, and cut off the fire from the open air. And still the bucket gang kept on baling.

Long ago day had sprung up bright and hot over the sea, and though the wind had dropped, a heavy swell still ran, and burst in a roar of surf on the beach. Crowds of country people stood among the fishing craft there, gaping at the spectacle, but no boat put off, and no signal fluttered an offer of help. The steamer which rolled dimly out there at her anchor in the heart of that cloud of steam and smoke did not attract them in the smallest, and if the English sailors (who had insulted the innkeeper, and still owed him a bill) thought good to occupy themselves with her, well, it was a matter for their own choice. It was one more proof of how mad these English were.

McTodd had a steam-pump running from the donkey boiler by this time, and for most of that day he was pumping the cool Atlantic down into the burning bunkers and forehold. Later on, when the fire eased somewhat, and the steamer was so low in the water that every other sea came bodily on board and she was in imminent danger of swamping, he

altered the process, and drew his supplies from the bilge.

Mr. McTodd was made of iron, but the others were softer. The eight firemen and trimmers, who were much worn with their long boat trip even when they came on board, were utterly exhausted by this time, and for the most part slept. But they kept on baling just the same, and if one of them tumbled from his perch, the burn of the hot iron decks soon awakened him.

Indeed, burns were the common portion of all hands, and steam-scalds and the blackings of much smoke. McTodd, perhaps, was not much changed in outward appearance; he was never, at his best, a smart man. But the spruce Captain Kettle was filled with disgust at his own appearance. He was as black as a chimney sweep, and his clothes were so charred that he was half naked as well. Even the thought that he was earning the wherewithal to provide many baths and much new raiment did not wholly console him. He was a man to whom uncleanliness gave acute physical discomfort.

As for meals, there was a water tank and a barrel of biscuit in the firemen's filthy quarters, aft in the counter, and to the former of these all hands applied with frequency. The biscuit they did not trouble much about just then.

Two long weary days they fought the fire, and got it in check; a third day, and it was plainly diminished; then, because both Kettle and McTodd were utterly exhausted and dropped off to sleep one after the other, efforts were slackened, and the fire gained; but on the fifth day they attacked it again with more savage vigor; and on the sixth day it was practically out.

During the last two days the late captain of the ship had come off in a fishing boat with various members of his crew, with the idea of again taking over possession, but Kettle would hold no parley with them. By his instructions they were pelted with belaying pins and other movables, and then, when they came within nearer range, some humorist turned the hose on them, which just then was pumping black, reeking water from the bilge.

The Spanish captain, who spoke English, shook a fist at Kettle, and called him a pirate. Kettle wagged a finger at the Spaniard, and spoke of his small attainments as a seaman, and made comments on his probable ancestry, and the defects in his bringing up.

"She was your steamer," said he, "and you found her too hot for comfort. I didn't ask you to come off and stroll about shore, but once she was derelict I took her over, and put a man's work into her, and now she is salved you can bet your

little life I am going to stick on to her till I touch my dividends."

The tired crew, so far as linguistic deficiencies permitted, enjoyed the episode thoroughly, and found it an agreeable interlude. As a finale, Mr. McTodd hit the dispossessed one on the head with an enormous lump of coal, which split like a shell and covered him with dust, and with that the boat rowed back for the beach.

"The dirtiest lampblack I've ever fired with," said McTodd. "You've to be using the coal slice to it every minute if you want to make steam. It's a pity it's all done, but I'm free to own it hurt my professional pride using it."

"What's that?" said Kettle sharply. "No coal?"

"Not enough to make up a packet of tooth powder from. I thought at least there'd be coke in the bunkers when she cooled down, but there's not; there's nothing but clinkers. I'm afraid, Skipper, you'll have to go ashore after all and wire for a tow-boat. It's a pity, after having dodged that innkeeper, to have to go near him again."

"Nothing of the sort. If you can't steam her, I'll sail her. As for the innkeeper, I'd have you know, Mr. McTodd, that I'm not a swindling Scotchman myself. That man shall have his account in full when I touch the salvage."

McTodd winked a grimy eyelid. "I bet that Spanish skipper would think it a very humorous observation if you were to tell him just now that you were not Scotch."

"Eh, what's that?"

"Oh, very humorous," chuckled McTodd, and stepped inside the engine-room again.

The steamer's anchor was lifted by hand, and under two trysails and two staysails she started on her way down alongside the brown hills of the Portuguese coast for Gibraltar. By degrees other sails were brought out, and with palm and needle, awnings and weather cloths were made into still other sails. Some were set on the funnel; others were set with derricks for yards; and each helped to add some fraction of a knot to her pace.

The vessel in her new garb presented a sufficiently fantastic appearance, and other vessels, as they passed, observed her through their glasses, and hoisted sarcastic comments in the commercial code of signals. Time after time Kettle turned these up in the signal-book, and swore as he worked out the meaning. As a result he presently turned the vessel out of the steam lane, and let her wallow along a lonely course of her own.

Another man would have worked her into the Tagus as the most convenient port on the Portu-

guese coast; and McTodd, who distrusted anything but steam, was all for this. Kettle was a steamer sailor, too, and the slowness of his present means of progression irritated him. But his distrust for the Spaniard and the Portugee outweighed all these considerations. True he would find a British consul ashore in these towns, but even this did not influence him. He had no ready cash, which was the one necessity—so far as his observation traveled—to win a "Dago" lawsuit. He had got the ship—a boon specially sent to him—and in pure thankfulness he ought to make the best of her. Gibraltar was the nearest British port, and although the Rock scorpions have an unsavory reputation for fleecing the stranger, to Gibraltar he intended to take his prize for realization.

So the old *Frying-pan,* as they had begun to name her, waddled down the Spanish and Portuguese coasts, anchoring when the wind headed her, making her twenty-five to thirty knots a day when all was prosperous. She nearly drifted on to the Burlings in a calm, but had no other adventure, and in due time she turned into the Straits. She was taken in charge by the current there, just missed being swept into the Mediterranean, and finally blew leisurely up to an anchorage among the coal hulks.

She lay there, one brilliant mass of fleckless red

rust, and a swarm of chattering boats flocked round her. There is no creature in the world more profuse in his offers of help than your Scorpion—if he thinks he will get overpaid for it.

And now Kettle's real worries began. The *Frying-pan* was without provisions, and he was without money, and he had to raise funds at a ruinous rate of interest. He had no reliable assistant; once the strain was off, Mr. McTodd thirsted to be ashore. He had a friend, it appeared, a tavern-keeper over in the Spanish Lines, with whom he had left an unfinished argument; the thing could be settled in a couple of days; and he didn't see why he shouldn't go, especially as Kettle refused to be convivial on board, even though whiskey in Gibraltar paid no duty. The firemen, too, were the usual shiftless lot who could not be trusted an inch.

However, he managed to get a cable off to the steamer's owners, and they with promptness replied that they had handed her over to the insurance company.

He applied next to the insurance company for full salvage, and then came delays. But, finally, their surveyor arrived, and was vastly impressed with the rust and ruin which was frankly displayed all over the boat, and by the next mail came an announcement that the company would hand over the steamer her-

self to the salvors as full satisfaction of their claims. Captain Kettle could have danced with rage at his disappointment. It was cash he wanted, and immediate cash at that. He had claims at home. He had pressing claims in Gibraltar, where credit is peculiarly short. And there he was, with that very unsalable thing upon his hands, a gutted steamboat of uncertain ancestry.

But to him in this extremity came a certain Rock Scorpion of his former acquaintance, and made an offer.

There was, to begin with, much beating about the bush, and, finally, the man said: "Well, Capitan, you must not be too particular. You must not aska too many questions."

"I ask no questions at all. I have named a price, and cash is what I want. If Old Nick was setting up a navy, and applied for the ship, and would pay for her, I would sell to him."

The Scorpion was visibly moved. "Who said about a navy? Somebody has splita."

"Rats! Let your hair alone. Don't you try any of your play-acting on me. If you want to buy, say so at once, and bring out your cash. If not, please get a move on you, and go down into your boat. Come, now, Solomon, which is it?"

The Scorpion did not like this brusque treatment,

but he recognized that this little man would not stand any further trifling. He brought out a fat pocket-book, and showed a sheaf of limp *peseta* notes. "How's thata?"

"Thousands and hundreds, are they? Let's see, the exchange is about 34.15 to the pound sterling. Let's see. H'm. There's about £1,090 in that package."

"Take them, Capitan, take them. I wish to do you a good turn. I am your fellow subject. Take them."

"For my steamer? Not likely, you thief."

"But I give you bills for the rest. Don't you understand that I buy steamer at your own figure?"

"Useful sort of thing a bill backed by you would be to realize on."

"But, Capitan, you do not understand. I am agent. There can be no other backer to the bill. It is politics."

"Call it highway robbery and you'll be nearer the mark. Think I've been in Gib. all these times without finding out what a Scorpion is yet, Solomon?"

The man wrung his hands.

"But, Capitan, you want to sell steamer?"

"And you want to buy."

"Then let us agree. I do not want to rob you. I am most honest man, and we together are fellow

subjects of Britannia. Here, take the eleven hundred and twenty pounds—the exchange is just a little different from what you said—and for the rest you shall not hand over the ship's papers till it is paid. You shall stay on board and take care of her till she is ours."

"Now you're talking. Give me the notes."

"Shall I take them and put them to your credit at our bank? We have a pretty good bank, my brother and I, and allow you liberal interest—say eight per cent. More than you get in England!"

Captain Kettle winked a sharp eye.

"Not one *peseta,* Solomon. I shall deal out their shares to the rest of the crew, pay a public house bill that is owing, and Mrs. Kettle will have my bit remitted to her by the next mail. Hullo, Mac!"

Mr. McTodd came into the ruined chart-house and leaned up against a rusty wall. "You seem pleased with yourself."

"Sold the old packet to Solomon here. You can go ashore, now, Mr. McTodd, if you choose, with money in your pocket to spend."

"Right! and it's about time I did. But there's that scrap of ours. I'm in rare hard fettle now, and I think I could do justice to you."

"Oh, if you want it," said Kettle pleasantly, "I'll break you up. Come out on deck."

"Send the Scorpion off first—we shall be too busy to watch, and these beggars will steal the keel off the ship if you take your eyes away from them."

So they saw Solomon down into his boat, and hauled up the ladder to discourage callers, and then they faced one another and put up their hands.

The many-nation crew of firemen and trimmers whistled to one another, and climbed on to the top of the deck-house to watch. They were connoisseurs in this sort of thing, and they appreciated to the full every hit and every guard.

It was a gorgeous fight!

CHAPTER VIII.

A CUP OF TEA.

"El reis seria," the door guard announced first of all, but when Kettle turned on him with a furious prohibition against ever again describing him as "the little captain," the man bawled out *"El Reis Keetle,"* as a further introduction. He did not seem to consider the pink-cheeked, panting Fenner worthy of any comment whatever.

The Sheik Hadj Mohammed Bergash, seated on the Sus mat at the further end of the room, welcomed the pair with unruffled composure, and bowed his head and said *"Slamma alikum"* with fine dignity.

"Slamma," said Kettle, and went up and seated himself cross-legged on the mat. He beckoned Fenner to his side, and that young man doubled himself up awkwardly, and then was half-strangled by a fit of coughing. "I am very pleased to make your acquaintance at last, Hadj Mohammed."

The Sheik Bergash touched palms with Kettle's, and kissed his own. "May your enemies die pain-

fully, and your family increase," said he in flowery Arabic.

"I'd like you to tone down those good wishes just a trifle," said the little sailor. "The present family's about all I can support. More of them would make me a bit too active. But while we are passing compliments, I should like to say that this hilltop town of yours is a mighty strong place, but riding up here from the beach is one of the hottest jobs I've struck for many a long day. I'm not much of a jockey any time, perhaps, but that red stallion you sent me down was a fair circus. He danced up nine-tenths of the way on his hind legs. As a consequence I've got a good four-dollar thirst on me."

"I do not quite understand."

"Well, Sheik, if you aren't T.T., I guess now's the exact moment to bring out the whiskey and soda. Let me introduce my young friend, Mr. Martin Fenner. He's thirsty, too."

"I have only the drinks allowed by my religion," said the Sheik, and clapped his hands and ordered them.

"Oh, bad luck," coughed Fenner, and Kettle clicked a dry mouth. "Now, I made sure, Hadj Mohammed, that a Moor who'd the taste you have for steamers and Lee-Metford rifles would have been civilized up to *gaiour* drinks as well. But you say

you aren't, and I don't know that I like you any the worse for it. You stick solid on your own religion, and I'd rather deal with a hard-shell Mohammedan than with a man who's half that and half nothing."

The Sheik bowed gravely.

"Besides," Kettle went on, "Mr. Fenner here wants to learn all about Morocco, and he can't do better than begin on a tumbler of hot green tea, with a sprig of mint in it, and as much sugar as it will dissolve. I'm glad to see the trade isn't blowing you a sandstorm here. We'd very strong trades as we steamed down coast, and off Mogador the sand was coming aboard as thick as a channel fog, and filling the very marrow in your bones with grit. Mr. Fenner here is a bit touched in the lung, and I thought the dust would have killed him. . . . Here's luck, Hadj Mohammed—I mean, *slamma*. It's many a long year since I drank green tea as sweet as this."

"*Slamma alikum*. This town, the other towns, the country near, the tribes of the Atlas, and Sus beyond, will regard you as their father, Reis Keetle. I am their spokesman to say it."

"I'm sure that's very kind of you, and gratifying to me. Perhaps, as we are on such friendly terms, you won't think it indelicate of me to remind you that there's a little bill outstanding between us."

"Oh, that!"—Sheik Bergash waved a small muscular hand. "It is not for us chiefs to talk of these mean matters of commerce. Solomon, my agent in Jebel-al-Tarik, will settle all these things with your agent."

"Not being in a position to keep a large staff just now," said the little sailor drily, "I am acting as my own agent. As for Solomon, he's got the usual Gibraltar Scorpion's failing. He's very slippery. So I just brought him along on my steamboat, and for reasons of safety I've locked him up in his room, and he's there this minute. Funny thing about Solomon is, he's complaining that you have landed him in for making a bargain which he now finds he hasn't the means of carrying out."

"I do not completely understand. You speak too tangled for me," said the Sheik.

"Well, I know my Arabic isn't yours. Mine's East-country Arabic, and not Moorish; and as for Berber, which is, I suppose, your other tongue, I don't speak it at all. However, I'll try to explain more clearly. That vessel that's lying at anchor off your beach belonged to self and partners. She was surrendered to us by some measly underwriters instead of lawful salvage price. We had her there in Gibraltar Bay open to offers, and your particular Scorpion came along. I'll admit she was not a

packet for everybody's money; fire had burned most everything in her that would burn; and, besides, she was a good deal buckled, and in most ways had lost her looks. But then the price was low to correspond, and I guess it was the price that brought Solomon along like a rat after a well-kept cheese."

"Solomon knew how much we could afford. He understands my affairs."

"He may think he did; they're a slippery crew, these Scorpions, and I never trust them overmuch, Sheik. But just now Solomon says he's clean fogged over your and his finance, and for once, in a way, I believe he's speaking the truth. We put in at Mogador, you know, for him to consult with some of his co-religionists, and he came out waving arms of despair like a windmill."

Hadj Mohammed Bergash threw out an elegant hand. "By Allah's mercy I am not a *Jehudi,* and so do not understand business. I am a Moor, and a true believer. You have brought me the rifles and the repeating cannon? You have brought also the heavy cannon to defend your steamer from the Sultan's steamers when they come to interrupt your trading?"

"There were certain cases," said Kettle very drily, "in number three hold, which were entered in the manifest as machinery, that might contain rifles and

a machine gun or two. I didn't break them open to make sure. There was also a case marked Grand Piano in number two hold which might very possibly be convertible into a big gun. Indeed, your Mr. Solomon was very anxious to have them lightered off here first thing."

"But they have not come!" said the Moor, wrying his face.

"You never spoke squarer truth. You see, there was that trifle of a balance between us, and I wanted that settled first."

"Tut, tut, tut. They must be brought ashore at once. The machine guns and rifles may be wanted any minute to defend the town. The Sultan's army is all around us, and each time they have attacked, our defence has been weaker. I tell you, Reis Keetle, my weapons must be brought ashore at once."

Captain Kettle bristled. "Come, now, Hadj Mohammed, don't you try that tone with me. I'm a man (as you've seen) that's all for civility if it can be managed; but if you choose to show ugly, there's not a man more capable of handling you between here and somewhere hot."

The Sheik's thin face darkened.

"Do you think, Reis, that I am what I am without having learned how to take care of myself? If you do not choose to give orders to have the guns

brought off, they must be fetched without. I shall give orders for a *kherb* to put off from the water port at once."

"You may send not only one lighter, but ten, if you choose," said Kettle contemptuously, "but you'll get nothing you want out of my ship without my written order. I suppose you've had word brought off that the mate's soft; and that's right, he is. But the ship's not left in charge of Mr. Mate. That packet, till I get back to her, is in the care of my chief engineer, a Mr. McTodd, who's also part owner till you've finished buying us out: and the Moors that get foul of McTodd during my absence will be damaged Moors. I believe the creature to be a poor engineer, and he's certainly unqualified; in religious matters he tends toward I don't know what damnable Scotch heresies; but as a fighter—well, there are no flies on McTodd when it comes to a scrap. I've seen him at it a score of times now, and I may even go so far as to own that I have had a turn-up with him more than once myself. You see that cut that's just healing on my cheekbone? Well, that's McTodd's signature, and let me tell you, Sheik, there are many a score of men who would give an ear and two fingers to be able to boast that they had written as much."

"Half a minute," broke in Fenner, "and don't look

round. I don't understand Arabic, but from the tone of your talk, and the ugly look that's growing round his Excellency's mouth, I gather that you've been pulling his gallant leg."

"We don't seem to agree just yet."

"Well, he's a primitive man, and he evidently sees much to approve of in primitive ways. Skipper, I say, don't turn round. There are four rifle barrels covering us, and if you move too suddenly they may go off. I caught sight of them just now when I reached down for my hanky. They're behind that green lattice-work window at the back of you, in the dark. Somebody opened a door there just for a second, and let the light in, and that's when I got my glimpse."

"You frightened?"

"I'll take my cue from you," coughed Fenner. "When you begin to shiver and shake, I'll consider about doing the same. No, I shouldn't say I'm scared, merely a bit thrilly, you know. Gives you heaps of pluck, of a kind, only to have one lung."

"What are you talking about?" asked Hadj Mohammed suspiciously. He pressed a shapely, thin hand against his brow, as though to sharpen his sight.

Captain Kettle waved an airy cigar. "Mr. Fenner was merely letting me know that you had followed

out your dog's instinct, and were preparing to have us murdered while we were partaking of your hospitality. Go ahead, Sheik, and tell your chaps to loose off. You won't get your guns, but you'll gain a distinguished reputation. Even the kids will point at your beard, and say, 'There goes the coward who was so frightened of two Englishmen that he even had to smudge his hospitality before he dared to murder them!' "

Sheik Bergash let off a long sentence in explosive Arabic, and finally came down to a mere calm explanation. "The men are my usual guard. We live here in troublous times, just now, Reis Keetle, and a guard is necessary. But if they make you frightened they shall be removed."

"Oh, not at all," said the little sailor, with acid politeness. "Don't let me interfere with any of your tribal customs. We each have our own little ways. For instance, of course, I have my own gun with me. It's in the side pocket of my coat, as you can see by the outline when I press it sideways. I hate to carry a pistol there, because if you are obliged to shoot, it sets fire to your clothes and makes a nasty untidy mess. But there are occasions when you haven't time to pull your fire-iron out of the sly pocket of your pants, and I guessed that one of them might occur up here in this whitewashed sitting-

room of yours, Hadj Mohammed. As a consequence, I've been quite ready all the time we've been squatting here to drill you through the bowels at less than half a second's warning. I suppose you took me for something different, eh?"

"Allah is very great," said the Sheik, and gave orders for his men behind the green lattice to retire. "Reis Keetle, you and I will call a truce for the time being." Again he wryed his face, and was obviously in pain. He loaded a thimble-sized pipe with keef, and took up its contents in three deep puffs of smoke. "I am not well, and men such as you and I cannot talk and treat at an even balance with fire and throbbings at work among their interiors. In the evening I will have a *cous cousoo* made, and while we eat that we will come to a settlement. As the hand lifts food to the lips, it sweeps away many disagreements."

"You have my permission to depart," said Captain Kettle quickly. He felt pleased with himself at slipping in this customary phrase before the Sheik could use it. "We'll look in again about supper time. You don't look well, Hadj Mohammed, and that's a medical fact. You've probably eaten something that's disagreed with you. Best thing you can do is to turn in on your mat and sleep it off. Mr. Fenner and I will amuse ourselves by looking

round the town, if the dust isn't too much for his cough."

. . . . . .

Captain Kettle's meeting with the consumptive Fenner had been curious, and at first sight they had by no means taken to one another. His vessel lay in Gibraltar Bay, which does not always contain the smoothest water in the world, and on that particular morning, what with tide, swell, southwesterly squalls, and one thing and another, it was more than usually lively. He had ordered steam for 6 a. m., and here it was 9.30, and still the agent, Solomon, had not come off with final instructions, in spite of many urgent messages and signals. Captain Kettle had several times consigned the Rock and Rock Scorpions to a climate even hotter than their own highest recorded summer temperature, and he bit off the end of his eighth cigar with an energy that was savage.

But as he raised his cupped hands to light a match, he saw a boat coming from the direction of the water-port mole, and heading directly for the ship.

She was a small boat pulled feebly and wetly by two oars, and Kettle cursed Mr. Solomon's economies in not choosing a larger and speedier craft. "But there's one comfort," he grumbled, as he watched the boat tuck her nose into three consecu-

tive seas, "he'll get a jolly good pickling for his pains. What's more, if he doesn't take to baling presently, I should say they'll be swamped before they're alongside."

But the passenger in the stern of the boat made no attempt either to bale or to steer; sat limp and huddled instead; and crouched *incognito* under a mackintosh and a hat with a generous brim. On to the foot of the ladder (when they arrived there) this person was pitched by the unceremonious boatmen, who, by way of proving that they had already received payment, rowed off promptly back for the shore. And there he huddled while the steamer rolled into three consecutive swells.

"Drunk or not," commented Kettle from the rail above, "I don't have you drowning off my front doorsteps," and sent down a pair of deckhands, with sharp orders. In the rude clutch of these the caller was dragged up to the deck level, and here displayed, not the well-known lineaments of Mr. Solomon, but the blood-tinged lips and hectic face of an entire stranger.

"Hullo," snapped Kettle; "who in the tropics might you be?"

"Fenner," choked the visitor. "Sorry for this display, but it's seasickness that brought on the hemorrhage again. I heard you were going to the

South Morocco coast, and wanted to beat a passage. If only some one here knew a little about doctoring——"

"Eh, what's that?" asked Kettle, stooping down.

"Ignorant looking lot," gasped the visitor, with closed eyes. "What a beastly nuisance; got to peg out now! All those beautiful schemes ahead and nothing done."

"What is it you want to do?"

"Queer gamble, health is," murmured the visitor, and forthwith leaned over into unconsciousness.

"You look pretty sick, and that's a fact," soliloquized Kettle. "You're feeling nervous. You don't seem to think I look much like a doctor, my lad, and other men before you have made that same mistake. If you could hear, I should like to point out to you that there are few people who know more about drugs than I do, and, what's more, I've got a bottle on board that will get to work on your complaint right from the first dose you swallow. It says so on the label. By James, I'll cure you, just to prove to you your blessed mistake. Here, you, take this gentleman up to my room, and tell my steward to get the clothes off him, and rig him in some clean, dry pajamas."

Out of so uncompromising a commencement, then, a friendship sprang up between these two that was

very real. Fenner increased in strength and soundness every day, either because of Captain Kettle's patent medicine, or in spite of it, and the shipmaster found in him a companion entirely to his taste.

"I heard of you ashore in Gib.," said Fenner, as soon as he could speak, "and I heard of you before from a fellow called Cortolvin I met at St. Moritz, and you've been the one man I've always wanted to have life enough to meet and to deal with. I've only got schemes. You've got health and vigor. It does me good, even to look at you." Indeed, so thoroughly did the invalid give himself up to that subtle form of flattery, hero worship, that not even the most austere of men could have avoided being gratified.

By the time the steamer had worked her slow way down the Atlantic coast of Morocco to Mogador, Fenner was on his feet again, full of vigor of mind, but weak still in body; and by the time she had brought up to her anchor off the port of Casadir, which the Sultan has so long closed, and the Sheik ashore proposed to open, he was so far recovered, that he was able to go off to the shore in Kettle's company.

"Bit of pretty bad luck finding his Excellency with stomach-ache," said Fenner, as they left the Governor's house. "Speaking as an expert on the matter,

a man can't help cantankering when he's feeling sick. My aunt, Skipper, but this place does carry a hairy great stink with it."

"If it were six times as strong, I'd feel happier. It's the smell of the skins they're drying in the streets, and it's skins that ought largely to pay the money that's owing to me and McTodd. But as it is, the *sôk* outside's closed."

"The what's closed?"

"*Sôk*—market outside the walls. The traders from Sus and the country round bring their camel loads there, and the Jews and Moors of Casadir buy. At one time Casadir used to be an open port, but the Sultan found he couldn't collect his customs—the Governor froze on to all the cash, I suppose—and so he closed it, and the stuff had to be carried along on more camels to Mogador for shipment. That didn't suit this town of Casadir, of course. It spelt busting for Casadir. So the Moors here, with Hadj Mohammed at the top of them, got their tails up, scragged the Governor, and sent word to the Sultan of Morocco that his beard was about the most ridiculous piece of asses' hair that ever wagged on a decaying chin. You don't know Arabic, Mr. Fenner, but you can take it from me that for putting real poetry into cast-iron hard language, there's no tongue on earth that can equal it."

Fenner laughed. "Well, I back you for being a good judge of both. Also of fighting. So the Sultan's repartee was to send an army to batter the place down?"

"He sent the army fast enough, but there was no battering. There's no such thing as a wheel road in Morocco, and the bridle tracks are far too bad for artillery. It's as much as you can do to get mules over the bad places. So the army came, living on the country as they marched, and finally got here and sat down in front of the place. You've seen what it is: the cone of a steep hill ringed round halfway down with high, strong walls, and the town built on the apex. It would be a grand mark for long-range artillery, of course, but that's what they haven't got. They've no appetite for storming the place, and there, I don't blame them, either. So they've simply sat down to starve it out, and that's going to be a slow job, too. Hadj Mohammed's no fool. He'd got three years' barley and oil and provision generally in the place before he began commenting on the appearance of the Sultan's beard, so as to give himself time to turn round and make his moves without being forced."

"The Sultan has a navy, though, hasn't he? I had some sort of a rattle-trap belonging to him pointed out to me at Tangier."

"That old tub! Why, she hasn't got a gun mounted. With half a dozen rifles I'd send her steaming away even with our *Frying-pan.* I told Solomon that when he first approached me about buying our packet for the job. But I did think there was better prospect of our getting paid. You know these Moors don't believe in banking. They change their money into French gold louis, and hide them in big stone jars. Solomon solemnly assured me that the balance of the purchase price should be handed over here in Casadir, and for once I believed him. I was figuring on those jars of louis. As it is, the Sheik has no notion of parting with a peseta. Well, I've not only got Solomon's deposit as security, but I've also got a good cargo of somebody's guns and ammunition, not to mention the steamboat."

They had reached the gate which gave on the outer *sôk* by this time, and through a wicket looked out upon the trenches of the besiegers, with their tents and horse lines at the foot of the slope. Tall, clean Moors, with tall, short-stocked guns squatted round them under the shade of the port, and passed with Kettle coarse, good-humored jests on the chances of the day. The Moor of Morocco is always in a genial temper with the savor of war, or hunting, or even of a small vendetta under his nostrils.

A peddler pressed among them with cakes and sweetmeats on a tray. A water-carrier shot a fine stream of water from his slung goat skin between bearded lips for an infinitesimal fee.

"All this doesn't seem to amuse you?" said Kettle to his friend.

"Why, no. At the present moment I'm poor, and for my schemes that I told you about, I must have money, lots of money. Therefore, now I'm commercial, first, last and all the time. You said you wanted money, too, for the mortgage on that farm of yours in Wharfedale. So, why not see if we can't turn a penny while we are waiting for His Whiskers to pay off his debt on the *Frying-pan?* I've been thinking. Leaving the Sheik out of the question for the time being, here's the simple plan——"

But on this topic, confidences were abruptly stopped. Down the narrow, twisted street which led to the *sôk* port, there came a growing roar of shouts; then the spattering of shots, with which the Southern Moor always punctuates his higher emotions; and presently a solid phalanx of white jelabs, with yellow and red slippers twinkling in and out beneath, with a crop of turbaned heads carried along with them above.

"The Sheik Bergash is dying," they yelled. "He

has been poisoned by the N'zaranees. Death to them, death! death! death!"

"Hullo," said Fenner; "this looks like pulling down the curtain before our play has begun."

"I'll thank you not to associate me with anything to do with theaters," said Kettle sharply. "You must know quite well they are bang against my religious convictions. If these swine are looking for trouble, by James, they shall have it." He backed into a doorway and pulled Fenner to his side. "You're no good with a gun, I know, so when it comes to shooting, aim at your man's stomach, and you'll about get him in the chest. That revolver of yours will throw up like a semaphore."

"I don't think," coughed Fenner, "that we can mop up the entire population of Casadir to our own cheek, but if you give the word, I don't mind having a try. How about when my pistol's empty?"

"Use the butt. Fill your other fist with coppers to give it weight, and slug with that as well. Use your feet, and your knees, too, if they get near enough. It's going to be 'all in' for this scrap. Don't waste your wind."

"My wind!" chuckled his friend, "I like that. As if I ever had any wind to spare."

"By James!" groaned Kettle, "I forgot that. You mustn't exert yourself to fight, or you'll bring on

your hemorrhage again and spoil all my physicking. By James!" he snapped out, as Fenner broke into a roar of choking laughter, "if you don't stop that fool's noise, I'll knock you down myself to keep you quiet."

But that uncanny laughter had a distinctly unlooked-for effect. The crowd, after being boxed up for so long in a beleaguered city, were naturally ripe for a little killing, and if some of them were killed in exchange, why that would make so many less mouths to fill. But the sight of that thin, gaunt man, doubling himself up with such unexpected mirth, daunted them altogether.

They wavered, and at first did not know what to make of it. Then some one murmured "Madman," and the idea grew; and the crowd shrank back shuddering, because they had been very near to slaying one whom Allah had especially smitten and protected.

"Hullo!" said Fenner, "I wish I understood Arabic; what are they frightened of, now?"

"You," said Kettle sourly. "They've got it into their heads that you're dotty. I call it a piece of beastly impertinence."

"Oh, don't call for a general apology on my account. Perhaps they're merely a guard of honor come to see us back to the Governor's house."

"Guard of skittles. They say we have poisoned the chap. I daresay he is poisoned right enough, too. That would explain all those wry faces he was pulling. Well, we shall be in a tight place if he pegs out, that's all. We shall never persuade them we hadn't a finger in it. I wonder if there was poison in that tea, and he intended it for me, and got the glasses mixed. Shouldn't wonder."

"What sort of poison strikes the popular fancy here?"

"Arsenic. Ties them all up in knots, like a fishing line with an eel on it."

"An emetic's the only thing for him, and then milk. Let's go back to the palace and try and doctor him. It will show willing, anyway."

"That's just what they're suggesting. They're offering a sort of guarantee, too, that they'll let us get there all in one piece. Not that I care much for their guarantee. If I had been alone, I could have fought my way through the crowd—yes, and not have disliked the job, either." He put this last sentence into contemptuous Arabic, and very nearly had the whole crew of them on to the top of him again.

The Southern Moor is a fighting animal, and has, moreover, a gracefully high opinion of his own dignity. But the idea that the N'zaranees, if they had poisoned, could undo their work, was growing

stronger in them. If the Sheik Bergash died, they could still deal with his poisoners later; and if, on the other hand, the victim recovered, they remembered, with grim chuckles, that the Sheik was quite competent to mete out justice to those who had tampered with his interior.

So presently Kettle and Fenner found themselves being escorted back whence they came by a crowd which, though talkative, was not actively interferent, and though Kettle's bitter tongue lashed freely in fluent Arabic, they reached the Governor's house without either being touched, or being forced to draw in their own defence.

It seemed they were expected. The Sheik's son met them at the inner door of the courtyard, and the outer doors clashed in the faces of their escort. The street outside hummed with their clatter. The house inside was full of armed men, and rustled with the whispers of unseen women. In the middle of the first courtyard was something covered with an untidy heap of draperies.

"That," said the Sheik's son, "was a woman sent by the Sultan (whose name I spit upon) to my father. We knew her to be a spy, but kept her to find out through her who were the other spies. Her use is ended to us, and as she to-day gave my father a cup of tea, she is now that. As for the other spies,

they are found too, and their heads will to-night be thrown down the hill into the Sultan's camp where they belong."

"You don't lose time, and that's a fact," said Kettle. "May I ask who it was that spread the report through the town here that it was we who gave your dad that cup of tea?"

The Sheik's son spread his hands. "I cannot tell you. These common people are very ignorant. If the heads of six of them would appease you, I will see that they are sent off to your steamer."

Kettle translated this last offer to his friend. "Nice of him," said Fenner. "Sort of local equivalent for a photograph, I suppose. But, so far as I am concerned, the gentlemen can wear their portraits a little longer. I say, just ask if anything's being done to his Excellency? The longer that arsenic is left alone, the deeper holes it is digging in his inside."

Kettle asked, and the Sheik's son shook his head.

What was written was written. His father had made the Mecca pilgrimage, was a Haji, and, in fact, felt himself to be a very holy man, and refused to tamper with the Fate that was dealt out to him. Moreover, neither he, nor any of his household, nor the local hakim knew of any further prescription. A verse of the Koran, written on paper, burnt to ash,

and swallowed in a mouthful of water was a remedy for most ailments, but it was no antidote for a cup of tea prepared by the Sultan's woman—late woman, rather—and may dogs eat the Sultan, as they certainly would what was left of his spy that very night.

"That's all very natural and filial, I guess," said Kettle, "but it doesn't seem to me to get Hadj Mohammed any forwarder. He's just fumbling out for the handrail to the bridge of El Sirat this minute, and if you don't look out he'll be dodging the pitfalls and walking over into Kingdom Come. (Heaven forgive me for talking this brand of theology, but I must make the pagan understand.) You needn't regret trying to drag him back. I guess the Prophet will keep his share of green-petticoated ladies unfaded till he's ready for them (and at any rate that's sound theology, because, of course, there aren't any ladies at all.) Come, now, my lad, do you give Mr. Fenner here and myself a free hand to try what we can do?"

"I know you Inglees N'zaranees have wonderful remedies. But there must be no cutting. It is against our faith, and it would annoy my father to enter Paradise with wounds other than those a soldier could boast about."

Captain Kettle formally stroked his red torpedo beard.

"On my head be it. There shall be no cutting. Show us now your father, and send men who shall bring all things that Mr. Fenner here thinks he may want. If emetics can do it, and he's not too far gone to use them, we'll have him scoured out down to the bare bone before you can tell off a chaplet of beads."

. . . . . .

Of the remedies that were applied to the Governor of Casadir, and of the results they gave, there can be no more detailed mention in a polite record such as the present. For all the rest of that afternoon and for the succeeding night they wrestled for him (as his son said) with the angel Azrael with every art that occurred to them, and he very nearly slipped through their fingers.

For the next two days, also, it was touch and go, and Mr. McTodd, who was in charge of the ss. *Frying-pan,* then rolling to her anchors in Casadir Roads, sent off a much-thumbed note, which stated that if he was expected to keep steam for full speed, as ordered, Captain Kettle had better send off coals per bearer; also a bottle of whiskey, if undersigned was not to faint in the exhausting heat of engine-room, after thumping mate's head at intervals, as per instructions.

In a week's time the Sheik was out of danger,

and the *Frying-pan* in the roads lay with drawn fires. From her at intervals Mr. McTodd sent notes which grew more insolent as their writer's thirst increased. But Kettle saved these up for later reckoning. For the present, he had the Sheik and the Sheik's debt to attend to, and also to spare an ear for the fine schemes of commercial aggrandizement which Fenner was constantly pouring into his ear.

It was no feeling of gratitude on the part of Sheik Bergash that finally made him disburse the moneys that were owing. It was due to an accident. During one of the worst spasms of his disease, Kettle had noticed a small string round the patient's neck, which threatened to choke his last gasping breath. He cut this adrift, and, seeing a small notebook attached, put it in his pocket, and there forgot it. During the early part of the Sheik's convalescence he missed this book, asked for it, and had it surrendered to him at once. Then he favored the little sailor with a stare that showed behind it anything but a grateful mind.

"It is the custom of Moors, Reis Keetle, to write down in such booklets as these all the principal events of their lives, and then, when the Prophet takes them to his own place, their sons take the book and read it, and profit by what it contains. But, as frequently happens, other hands than a son's get the

book, and one profits to whom the dead man was no kin."

"*B'ism illah,*" said Kettle, seeing that he was expected to comment.

The Sheik moistened his lips. "There have accrued to me from time to time certain stores of coin, which I have poured into jars, and (as they filled) hid them, one by one, there and here. The places of hiding are written in the book for my son."

"Oh, are they?" said Captain Kettle.

"It was always my intention to pay you honestly for the steamer, and for the weapons you have brought me. So you may take my men and dig for the jars which are hidden under the middle walk of the garden in the further courtyard. You will find there the sum complete."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to your Excellency, and when I get the coin on board I'll make you out a receipt with a stamp all complete. But did you imagine I went through that book I took from your neck?"

"Assuredly."

"Then you are wrong, my buck. I can't read a letter of Arabic."

Sheik Bergash thumped a fist on to the mat beside him, and used the only word in English that he knew.

Kettle grinned. "After all, that little word does ease you better than all the flowery Arabic that was ever invented. Well, there's no time like the present, and I know you wouldn't wish for a chance to change your mind. I'll just settle up these little matters and go on board again. So long, for the present."

He left the room then, called men, and set about these new duties; and two hours later was being rowed off with Fenner to the steamer.

"By James!" said he, patting the tiller, "won't Solomon's and McTodd's eyes fairly bulge when they see the cargo of louis we have brought off. But there are those letters to square for first. You stand by, boy, and watch me settle up with McTodd. The dissolute mechanic! I'll teach him the polite art of letter writing."

"I wish," said Fenner regretfully, "I'd your strength or McTodd's for a friendly turn-up of this kind. I've all the appetite for it; but as it is I can only stand outside the ring and look on. Don't you think it's rather hard to tantalize me?"

"Oh, well," said Kettle, "if you put it like that! Now, I tell you what. We'll tap a bottle of whiskey instead. I've got one hidden, and McTodd will like it just as well."

CHAPTER IX.

THE COMMAND OF THE SEA.

"THE trouble, you see," said Mr. McTodd, "is coals. That argan oil they've sent off is too light for cylinder lubrication, as I've said, but now you tell me there's a pinch, Captain, I think I can manage by mixing it with what I have left. But the coal question's a fair knock-out. The bunkers are nearly swept; it would be all I could do to steam her to the Grand Canary Coaling Company's transporters at Las Palmas, and that's the nearest for rebunkering; and if you stay on here for any more naval manœuvres off this South Morocco coast, it will simply mean putting sail on her again, and blowing to the Islands down the Northeast trades. I don't know whether you like steamer sailing, Skipper, but it's too slow for me."

"I've had quite enough of sailing this old *Frying-pan* already," said Captain Kettle. "But if we don't stay, the Sultan's steamer will come in and blow Casadir into brickbats. She's got a long gun, it seems."

"Looks as if we were in a regular hat," coughed Fenner.

The engineer stepped out of the shabby chart-house, and stared across the water at the white town of Casadir on its conical hill, and at the great mountains beyond, with their patches of timber. He waved a black-nailed hand toward them. "I could burn wood at a pinch. Our furnaces here are no' adapted for it, like they are in the Mississippi trade, and Mobile, and those places, but you say it's a pinch, Skipper, and I've had unwonted civilities from ye o' late, and I'm anxious to oblige."

"Wood?" said the little sailor bitterly. "You might as well ask for best Welsh steam coal at once. There are 30,000 of the Sultan's troops between Casadir and those forests, and although they don't show from here, we'd soon have their bullets singing among any wood-cutting party we sent ashore."

"Weel," said McTodd thoughtfully, "I never found a few bullets flickering about do me any harm. I'm a man o' property now; I'm a man so enormously rich that I could rebuild the kirk in Ballindrochater, which my father so long ornamented with his ministry, without feeling it; but still in spite of that I'm keen not to miss this offer of the Sheik Bergash's. Man, think of it! I'm worth now all o' twenty-five hundred pound, besides what I have settled on my mither from an adventure or two in the Arctic."

"Yes," said Kettle, with a sigh. "We've been

pulling it in, all of us. I'm ready to pay off that mortgage on my farm now, and get my eldest daughter taught the harmonium by the best professor in Skipton, and have money in the bank besides. That is, when the money's got home. At present you must recollect the most of it is here on the ship in hard gold louis."

"It's the way with us millionaires like it is with the others of the breed; we're just bitin' to get more. Man, Kettle, but money's an awful responsibility."

"Also, I don't want the Sheik of Casadir to have his end knocked in. That man got his tail up against the Sultan of Morocco, and he told me why, and I respect his reasons, and want to see him through with his trouble if it can be managed. I have seen," the little man added simply, "trouble myself, and know what it means."

"I suppose it amounts to piracy," said Fenner, "if we whack into the Sultan's ship as things now stand?"

"It does," said Kettle, "but notwithstanding, if I was alone I should risk it. Down here in South Morocco we are a long distance from international law courts, and there are ways," he added grimly, "of keeping people from talking. But there's you to be considered. I'm not going to drag you with your bad lung into complications like these."

"I wish," said Fenner testily, "you'd leave my lung alone, or at any rate, look at it the right way. Ordinary men can take things as they come; I want to pack the experience of a lifetime into about two years, see? Also, I particularly want to save Casadir from that blackguard Sultan, and, moreover, to make Casadir exceedingly grateful to its salvors."

"Oh," said Kettle, "they'll give us gratitude enough, if that tickles you. They'll kill sheep for us, and half choke us with perfumes, and then show us a powder-play to finish up."

"I want something much more prosaic than that," coughed Fenner. "I want a trading concession. Casadir is the natural outlet of the Sus country at the back there, and, thanks to the paternal rule of the Sultan, the Sus trade has been as nearly strangled as it could be. There's not a single blessed port or exit anywhere. Make one, and you'll have oil, almonds, gum, barley, wheat, maize, hides, gold, metals, and ten other things pouring down to the coast as fast as you can ship them. The country's as rich as blazes; it only wants a chance."

"Well," said Kettle impatiently, "everybody knows that, and so's the moon rich, if what I read on that Chest Reviver patent medicine circular of yours the other day is true. The only trouble is,

we've just as much likelihood of doing trade with one as with the other."

"The moon I'll give you, but I want to have a hard try for Casadir."

"The moon?" said McTodd with a puzzled look, "I do not see how you could possibly get anything from the moon. Ye must know by the latest astronomical——"

"Oh, dry up," said the passenger. "Look here, Skipper, I want to know what's wrong with the Casadir scheme. The Sultan will object, and I'm calculating on war with the Sultan. That we've got already, and are prepared for, and presently we'll lick him off the face of the local land and water. But who else will interfere?"

"The British Government for one."

Fenner's keen, haggard face showed plain surprise. "Do you really mean that?"

The grim head nodded assent.

"But what's the game?"

"Ah, now you're asking me a prize conundrum, that's quite beyond me. But I can give you a few plain facts about the British Government if you care to listen."

"Go ahead."

"To begin with, the Sultan of Morocco is a rather bad egg, and they know it. He'll do nothing for his

country, and does his best to prevent anybody else doing anything, and they know that, too. The Germans and the French are pressing in and getting all the trade (that used to be ours), and all the influence (which we used to have), and if our Government don't know that as well, it isn't for want of telling. But will they help a Britisher to get a finger in the pie? Not they. More than that, if they catch him trying, they twist his tail. They're what McTodd here calls a humorous lot."

"But what's the game?"

"I don't know. I've often occupied myself by trying to wonder if they knew themselves. But," the little man added with a sigh, "they are too deep for me. As a shipmaster I've used the seas for a considerable number of years now, and the British Government have sat down and spent a regular amount of hours each week in giving me annoyance. They're a rum lot."

Fenner brought a lean fist down hard on to the end of the settee. "It's the most amazing thing in the world. Here's Britain with an enormous empire over seas, and it's all been got in spite of her Governments. Clive, Hastings, Cromer, Rhodes, and the rest, they've all been fought against most bitterly by the very people they were trying to serve. Well, I suppose it's that which gives the final relish

to the occupation, and so produces the men who carry it out. The other nations would be only too pleased to help their chaps if they would get them new kingdoms, but no men come forward. Our dear folks at home oppose, thwart, blackguard, imprison, and do everything they can to make the game awkward, and so there are plenty of us ambitious fools who want to play it, out of sheer delight at its hardness."

"I've read yon book of Jules Verne's about a voyage to the moon," said McTodd, "and it's scientifically incorrect. I'm no' decided myself just at present what means ye'd have to employ to get there."

"Let me understand this," said Kettle, leaning forward. "I've heard a lot of these 'schemes' of yours, boy, but I haven't understood much about them, so far. Isn't this your own row you're hoeing?"

Fenner laughed and flushed. "Isn't it very simple to understand? I'm full of energy and ambition, and very empty of health. I'm a wretched consumptive, and so I can't look forward to founding a family, which is what nearly all other ambitious men do when they start on their ambitions. I'm the one in the million, and my fad goes in another direction. I've got the land-hunger on me, the national land-hunger, and I'm going to gratify it."

"But, boy, you're a pauper. You told me so yourself."

"Oh, ways and means remain to be found. Incidentally I shall have to get rich; first you must have tons of money if you want the power to work this game; and because I have very little time, I've got to get rich quick. If I'd got a long life ahead of me, for instance, I should say let this Casadir scheme slide, and look out for a more favorable opening. Want of coals is the thing that proposes to trip us up just now, I gather."

The sailor pulled angrily at his red torpedo beard. "That's the trouble, boy, and I don't see any way of getting to windward of it."

"And the Sultan steamer will have lots?"

"Sure to have as much as she can stagger under. She'll have put across to Gibraltar for bunkers before she started down here. That's her way."

"Nothing like being regular, so that people may know your habits. The plain thing to do then is to get the Sultan's coals. That bags two birds with one stone: it leaves him helpless, and gives us plenty more string; I know it's a large order, but——"

"By James!" rapped Kettle, "we'll do it. As for the how, that will bear a bit of thinking out. She's got a big gun that will shoot a long distance. Our big gun, thanks to Solomon's economies, is a second-

hand relic, with the threads of the breechlock half stripped, and the rifling all rusted away. The odds are it would burst in the firing, and it certainly wouldn't throw to any useful distance. It seems to me a case for strategy."

"But look here," said McTodd. "With regard to the moon, I've been thinking——"

"Oh, blister the moon!" said Fenner. "Let's get a boat into the water, Skipper, and nip off ashore, and fix things up with the Sheik. Hurry will be very useful just now."

"You're right," said Kettle. "We've got to get a move on us if we're going to come out top side. Mac, I leave you in charge of the ship, and I'll tell that putty-headed mate he's to take his orders from you. If the Sultan's ship gets here while I'm away, and looks ugly, heave up, and steam off down coast. We'll join you somehow."

"Man, but running away's a thing I don't like. I thought the arrangement was we were to get hold of this Sultan's ship and take the coal from her."

"Kindly carry out the orders that are given you," snapped Kettle. "You can't argue with a ship that carries a gun which will shoot four miles, and which she will use as soon as she's within range. Can't you remember that Casadir's a closed port, and that our being here is bang against treaties and laws and

everything? And there's another thing. Just you pull yourself together and keep off the drink. There's only one bottle of whiskey left, and I want to keep that for a special celebration."

"My good Captain Kettle," said the engineer solemnly, "the responsibility of this great fortune I'm possessed of has changed me to a different man. Besides, what's the use of one single bottle for a man with my coefficient of absorption to sit down to start a bout at?"

A boat presently left the *Frying-pan* (as the steamer had now come to be firmly nicknamed) and pulled off parallel to a beach that was littered with a noisy surf. The northeast trade was blowing strongly and the swell ran high, and Kettle passed a malediction on the sand which would be filling the atmosphere ashore. "It's disagreeable for any one," said he, "but with your sick lungs, boy, it's more than dangerous. I shall leave you in the boat and go up and do my bit of business with old Hadj Mohammed, and then come back for you. You won't have so much sand blown down your throat if you stay by the boat."

"Don't keep harping on my decimal of a lung. To begin with it's bad taste, and to go on with it tends to make me hurry things unduly."

"But, my good boy——"

"Now, Skipper, kindly dry up."

The little sailor sighed, but for a wonder did not persist. This tall wreck of a young man, with his hollow cheeks and great beak of a nose, had come strangely to dominate him. At first it was Fenner's bodily weakness that had appealed to him; but then the glamour of the man's magnificent ambitions began to fascinate him; and presently here was Captain Kettle, a fellow with an overweening love of power himself, and one who never took an order civilly, allowing himself to be quietly ordered about.

The beach offered no chance of landing that day, so Kettle took his boat through the noisy spouting flurry of broken water which marked the river bar to the southward, and for a short time came within range of the besiegers' lines, from which the Sultan's troops promptly favored them with an erratic fire. The oarsmen of his boat said they had not been hired to be shot at, and wished to return. But the application of the little sailor's venomous tongue, and the threat of a clubbing from the oaken tiller, reduced them very quickly to sullen obedience, and presently a bluff gave them shelter from the gun-fire.

Beyond a half mile of flat the town reared up on its hill, deliciously white under the sunshine, graceful with minarets, and delicately pleasing to the eye. The great encircling wall below dished it up with all

possible neatness. Kettle gazed upon it appreciatively.

"Yes," said he; "forget the smells inside those walls, and the garbage in the streets, and you could write poetry about Casadir that even a fat-headed magazine editor could see the beauty of."

"Blister the poetry!" said Fenner irritably. "Tell me how we are going to get there. The water port's shut, but I suppose if we went up and knocked they'd open it. If we could run, it would be all right. Those marksmen over there have got muzzle loaders, and don't loose off at moving targets. But I can't run—at least not half a mile. And if we walk, we shall be jugged for an absolute certainty."

"I don't think it, and anyway, as I shall walk on the weather side, you'll have the benefit of my doubt."

"Fat lot of good that would be to me. Do you think a man of my length could get under the lee of a shrimp like you?"

Kettle turned on his friend with a sudden acidity.

"Now, look here, my lad, you make one more remark upon my personal appearance, and you'll feel the heft of my fist, lungs or no lungs."

"I beg your pardon. I'd forgotten it was a sore subject, and I really did not mean to rile you. But a fix like this is maddening. I can't afford to wait,

because there is so little time for things; I don't want to get killed, because there are so many things to do; and here we are at a rather bad kind of deadlock. Isn't there another way of climbing into this blighted town? Can't we get back over the bar again to sea, and have a try at running through the surf for the old landing place?"

"Not a cat-in-oven chance—what's that you're doing now?"

"Waving to those jokers on the walls. It's too far off to see if there's any one we know, but they'll guess who we are right enough, and I don't see what's wrong with their hammering out the fact that we're here for business, and not merely to pay a polite call. By Allah, they've tumbled! Look there!"

Of a sudden the valves of the water port were flung open, and the archway emitted a gush of horsemen. With much crackling of guns these galloped across the plain and brought up momentarily on the river bank with a swirl of draperies. They had with them two led horses, and ten seconds later these were mounted by riders, and the sortie returned through a whistling hailstorm of home-made slugs. Two horses dropped and their riders jumped clear, and ran on, each clutching a friend's stirrup-leather, and three horses came in riderless.

"It was written," said the captain of the water port, as he let them in, and the great doors swung shut again, "it was written that three fortunates who rode out from here ten minutes ago, unsuspicious of fate, should now be smiling on their brides in Paradise. Here you, take Reis Kettle and the man with the great nose (on both of whom be much honor) to the carpet of the Sheik Bergash, and do you other dregs of the *sôk* refrain from crowding these truly great men."

Their progress thence to the Sheik's house would have been an unbroken ovation, but for Kettle's dislike for one particular catch-word. The crowd, with the desperation of a long-besieged people, leapt at any chance of succor, wove a thousand stories of relief from the return of these two Europeans, and shouted their encouragements with Oriental effusiveness and imagery.

They clapped on Fenner a catch name and attributes from his big nose which would probably have made him blush if he could have understood the flowery Arabic, though as it was he rode on only placidly tickled. But Kettle they unfortunately acclaimed as *el reis seria*—the little captain—and let loose upon themselves a squall of that mariner's bad temper.

The sailor was acutely sensitive on the subject of

his inches, and already that hot morning Fenner had touched him on this sore spot. For the united dregs of the Casadir bazaars and *sôks* to take up the cry behind him was too much. Again and again he spurred his horse into the mobs, trampling on slippered feet, and (worst insult he could think of) knocking off turbans and slapping the shaven heads beneath them.

At the first moment the pair were within a hair's breadth of annihilation. Life is always perilously cheap in those towns of Southern Morocco, and in Casadir just then, after a year's siege and its accompanying atrocities, the value of a life had come down almost to the vanishing point. The Moor is a man with a very nice and touchy honor, and the cry arose of "Infidel! Infidel! Kill! Kill!"

But on one of the bald pates so rudely exposed, some wag of the *sôk* suddenly discovered the clawings of female nails, and in that poetical Arabic, which clothes all these things so delicately, yelled out some ribald reference to domestic infelicity. The Moor has also among his many other attributes a quaint and frisky humor. With laughter twisting one side of the mouth, and murder curling on the other, the crowd swayed for a moment, and then took the brighter view.

"*El reis seria,*" they yelled, "*seria! seria!*" and

when again and again Kettle charged viciously among them, it was with laughter that they warded off his buffets, not with the up cut they could so neatly deliver with the curved dagger.

At length two heated Europeans, one much shaken with laughter, and the other with indignation, were admitted to the great house of the Governor, and after walking through courtyards, and gardens, and many corridors, were ushered to the place where the great man himself sat smoking keef on his carpet.

"*Slamma,*" said Kettle. "I have never been so much insulted in my life, Hadj Mohammed. Every son of a dog in your town seemed to think he'd a right to yap at me as I rode up."

"*Slamma alikum,*" said the Sheik Hadj Mohammed Bergash. He took one of the long five-foot guns from his guard, withdrew the ramrod, and handed this to Kettle. "Reis Keetle, an insult to you touches very nearly myself. To-morrow I will send to you the tongues of these talkers, who are, as you truly say, sons of dogs. If the tongues when threaded on that ramrod do not fill it, with a dishful over, I give you leave to call me a niggard, and further permission to come here and tear out my tongue also."

Captain Kettle stirred uneasily in his seat. "I didn't want you to rub it in quite as hard as that,"

he said rather haltingly, but the Sheik put away his objections with a wave of his small brown hand. "You may consider the thing as done," said he. "I wish I could do more to show my consideration for you. To say the truth, we men are cheap here in Casadir just now, and if the Sultan's troops break in, which they assuredly must when the ship comes with her gun to help the army below there, why then it will matter little when all heads are cut off whether or not there are tongues left to wag in them."

"Don't apologize," said Kettle pleasantly. "You've told me something I very much wished to know. You've owned up to being desperate, and therefore you won't grudge me a lot of men to help me carry out a scheme Mr. Fenner and I have set our hearts on. We're going to mop up that Sultan's steamer for you when she shows herself here."

"You may have half the men in the place to use if you need them, and if all are lost it cannot be helped. There is no other hope to save the rest—and our women, and the children, who will otherwise be taken as slaves. *Slamma,* Reis Keetle, I kiss your hand. You are a brave and generous man. Does his Excellency Fenner take command with you?"

"Here, I say, Skipper," Fenner interrupted, "just

translate a bit. I hear the pair of you using my name, but I can only pick up one word in ten from the rest of your Arabic. What's this about half the men in Casadir?"

"I reckon it will take that amount to mop up the Sultan's steamer. Don't you make any error, boy. It's going to be an uncommon tough job."

"And what's the pay, what's the reward?"

"I haven't bargained for that yet."

"Very unbusinesslike of you, then. Tell him that if we clear away this steamer for him that the investing army at the inland side of the town will retire from lack of supplies, and so Casadir will be practically an open port, and he himself will be an independent chief, and clear, at any rate for the time being, of that feeble scoundrel of a Sultan. Rub it into him that although this is what he's been aiming at all along, he hasn't been able to get it without our help, and then just tell him that we want our fee."

"Oh, you've settled in your mind, then, what it's to be?"

"What you and I want—and are going to have—is a concession of the whole of the shipping from Casadir after trade is opened again."

"But what's the use of getting him to agree to it? He'd give us his promise fast enough, but, even if we

had it all written out, and the names signed to it across a sixpenny charter party stamp, it wouldn't be worth the paper it's written on if he chose to show slippery. You can't pin these sort of foreigners, boy, with anything short of a gun. The only way to boss this town is to turn out Hadj Mohammed altogether when we've mopped up the Sultan's army, and for me to be Sheik in his place. Then anything that I say is concessed will remain so."

"It will very probably come to that, or something like it. But, in the meanwhile, you get the agreement down in black and white, Skipper, and then afterward when the Powers begin to ask questions—which they will—we shall have something to wave in their faces."

"Oh, very well, boy!" said Kettle, "anything to oblige," and put the condition before the Sheik, by whom it was promptly accepted. Indeed, the poor man was in so desperate a plight just then that he had no alternative; and, besides, with repudiation always at the back of his mind, it really seemed to him to make very little alteration in the odds whether he signed ten such documents.

The Sheik Bergash in his then condition has struck many of his observers as a figure of pathos. He was a man of much capacity on the lower scale, and chance, mistaking him for something bigger,

had pitchforked him into a position which a Napoleon might well have shirked.

In one of the most barbarous and powerful empires of the modern world, he was set up, with ridiculously small resources, as the head of a body of seceding rebels. If, as seemed probable, his amiable sovereign put him to rout, a comprehensive massacre and the sowing with salt of all his desolated territory would be prompt award. And if, on the other hand, he was lucky enough to maintain a sturdy independence, promptly there would descend upon him the net of European diplomacy, and in the meshes of that he would merely struggle himself into exhaustion.

But Mohammed Bergash did not look so far ahead as this. Let the Sultan's army be cleared away, and the Sultan's ship be sunk, and he saw only prosperity.

Captain Kettle, too, was more man of action than far-seeing diplomatist. The new four-point-seven gun on the Sultan's steamer seemed to him the one and only key to the situation, and once it was taken, at whatever expense to the attacking force, then the future would run on easy machinery.

But Martin Fenner had the power to look upon things more with a statesman's eye. As he sat there in that heated room, he remembered his previous gleanings on the subject, and put these together.

He remembered that the Great Powers of Europe, always as jealous as cats of one another, looked upon Morocco as the next slice of Africa to go to one or another of them in the general scramble. He recalled that each was firmly determined to make war on any other which did the actual grabbing; and so as a result they all sat around and watched the Empire crumble; but at the same time all showed nervousness and suspicion if the crumbling process in any one district took place with any unseemly rapidity.

It was with this charming country, then, that Captain Kettle still kept his fortunes, though he might well have retreated from it with a decent competence. But there was that lively condition which he always spoke of as "trouble" in the air, and this was a state of things which habit had made to him an almost necessary ingredient of his existence.

The white sunshine of the streets outside the Governor's house was cooled by a strong trade, which blew with it a burden of sand, that irritated Fenner's throat, and made him cough and swear. But they had small enough leisure to give attention to these minor discomforts. In the space of the next few hours it was more than probable that one or both of them would be killed, and in the meanwhile there was abundant necessity to make all

preparations, so that this exit should not be made uselessly.

In one of the open market spaces of the town men were collected by criers, ranged into line, and told that presently when night came they would be formed into a forlorn hope to give their lives for the safety of the town.

Most of them heard the news without emotion; a few, indeed, showed placid satisfaction; not one offered an objection.

"By Jove, but they're a plucky lot!" said Fenner admiringly.

Captain Kettle's brow darkened.

"They think, according to their misguided religion, they're booked for Paradise, but according to my theology, they'll be badly surprised at the climate they do bring up in on the other side. If I'd time, I should much like to convert some of them to the true fold before they start."

"Wouldn't it be better if we could keep them this side of the Styx a bit longer? They're fine men, and it seems such a pity to waste them. Besides, once we've got Casadir in running order again we shall want all the men we can get."

"It can't be helped. When the Sultan's boat comes and has brought up to her anchor, we must just pack men into all the kherbs they've got down

there in the river—lighters, that is, you know—pull out across the bar, and take that steamer with our hands."

"I don't see that such a scheme would have a chance."

"I do," snapped Kettle. "I've tried the same sort of thing before, and brought it off all right. It's only a question of having enough boats and enough men. They can't sink all before you come up alongside."

"H'm," said Fenner thoughtfully. "D'ye think that courier from Mogador that the Sheik's fellows grabbed with the message to the Sultan's army here was genuine?"

"He got killed fast enough, and as for the *chit* he carried, I had that read out to me, and it sounded all right. Their steamboat put into Mogador to mend up machinery. They'd broken down three times in the engine-room since leaving Tangier, had lost one anchor and fifty fathoms of chain, but expected to get on here by the late afternoon of to-day. All those breakdowns sound too natural for a faked message. Of course, the clumsy fools may pile her up between Mogador and here, but that's hardly an event for us to reckon on."

"Not a bit. No, Skipper, she'll come, and we'll make use of her. That loss of one anchor simplifies

things very much. We'll grab her for the new kingdom of Casadir, and with that four-point-seven gun we'll hold command of the local seas. Now just put your ear close. I don't want the whole world here to listen."

Martin Fenner whispered twenty words, and then Captain Kettle stepped back and looked at him admiringly. "Well, of all the blasted impudence!" he said.

"I believe it could be carried through."

"I'll do it for you on one condition. You're not to try and come too. It would be just suicide for you with your sore lung to risk the exposure."

"I can't come possibly," said Fenner, "I can't swim a stroke."

Then Kettle turned to the men drawn up in the square, and in his broken Arabic informed them that before their forlorn hope set off, a still more forlorn hope would precede them, and for this he asked for six volunteers who were to be swimmers. The whole five hundred stepped forward, and he picked his half dozen. Finding, however, on cross-examination that none of these could swim a yard, he beat them over the head for deceiving him, and made a fresh selection. Then he told the rest that there was no chance of Paradise for them that evening, and that on another occasion, when he had a

little more time, he would give them a more accurate description of their destination. He added that they had his permission to depart.

. . . . . .

That night Martin Fenner sat on a housetop in Casadir, and coughed, and watched, and sweated with weakness and anxiety. Over the sea below the town was spread a black curtain of night, unbroken by either moon or star—vast, empty, achingly untenanted. And yet somewhere in that void before him was Kettle and his six men in desperate ambush.

Into this blackness about midnight there slid the lights of a steamboat, coming slowly in from the north. Presently the steamboat stopped, but the sounds of her anchoring did not reach him. The roar of the beach below and the whistle of the trade drowned all lesser noises. Then the blackness snapped over the steamboat's lights, one by one, till all were eclipsed.

Fenner rubbed his lean hands and tried to think that the watch she kept was slatternly, and waited and waited on through the drearily dragging hours of half the night.

It was not till the dense black of the scene was turning to gray that the hint was given him that Captain Kettle had put his plan into action. The

steamer showed in dim outline on a heaving sea, white-crested. From the forepart of her, low down near the water's edge, came a sudden snap of flame, which was gone in a moment. In the growing light men showed on her decks, running about like white-sheeted ghosts, and presently dawn sprang up behind the great crags of the Atlas inland, spread over the sea, and in another minute it was glaring day.

Fenner put a hand over the bridge of his great beak of nose, and peered out at the bright-lit waves. Yes, there were one, two, six, seven dots of heads swimming in hard for the shore. Other eyes saw them at the same time, and from the steamer broke out an ill-aimed crackle of musketry.

The Sultan's steamer was plainly adrift. The flash that had shown through the end of the night was the firing of a cake of gun-cotton which had cut through her riding cable. Plainly also she was out of command. Captain Kettle and his men had contrived to swim off the heavy chain with its floats all right, and had wound it round propeller blades and rudder, and had shackled the ends, and made the Sultan's steamer into a helpless hulk. Her people had tried to get her under weigh. Steam shot from her escapes, and oozed from the engine-room skylight. Evidently also they had achieved another of their breakdowns.

Then *boom* went the four-point-seven gun on her main deck, and from somewhere above him in the town came the crash of masonry.

The steamer drifted in rapidly toward the surf under the push of the brisk trade wind, and seeing destruction before her, fired with vicious energy. Out of thirty-four shots she made six hits, and did an inconsiderable amount of damage, and then she took the ground, and the men of Casadir went down to the brink of the surf to pay what attention was due to her people.

But half an hour before this final event took place, the sea decanted on to the beach Captain Owen Kettle and his two remaining men, and him Fenner greeted as a man who has looked on victory from afar greets the actual conqueror.

"Skipper," he said earnestly, "I believe you're one of the greatest Englishmen of the day."

"I'm Welsh by birth all the same, if you don't mind, boy, though most people forget it. Here, for James' sake let me find my clothes. A man can't keep his respect unless he's properly dressed. Then we'll take a boat to the *Frying-pan* and see about hauling this other packet off the ground when the Sheik's men have done handling her people."

They did this, and were met at the head of the ladder by a very smiling McTodd. "Man, Fenner,"

said he, "I see now what ye meant by yon reference to the moon. With regard to a journey to it, my father, who was minister at Ballindrochater, took up mathematics at Aberdeen University before he studied theology, and I mind in one of his sermons about the moon——"

"Oh, to blazes with the moon!" said Kettle. "Come into the chart-house and let's split that last bottle of whiskey. When that's down, we shall have a sweet job in pulling the other half of the Casadir navy off the ground there. We shall want both steamboats if we're to keep command of the sea round here."

CHAPTER X.

AN EXCHANGE OF LEGS.

THE Moor who brought the news of the disaster to Fenner in his office in Casadir had never seen a wild animal behind bars, but his description of Captain Owen Kettle in that horrible prison far away in the heart of the Sus country, had much in it that was pathetic as well as terrible.

This man, Mazelle, was the only creature that had escaped alive out of the ambush. Others—men, camels, mules and horses—had straggled, but these had all been cut off as in their panic they headed back for the Sus river up whose valley the caravan had made its way from the Moroccan coast. Mazelle, with a fanatical devotion to his Reis Keetle, had followed him and his captors into that unmapped town of the far African interior, and had there killed a water-carrier, and taken up his water-skin and business through the single desire to be near his N'zaranee chief.

Said Mazelle: "I been fighting man all my life, Excellency. I seen plenty fine men, great sheiks,

great kaids. But I never saw one with more man in him than Reis Keetle. That is why I went back to be his follower still, even though he had fallen."

His picture of the common prison, into which the wounded sailor was thrown, was sufficiently horrible, and Fenner remembered with grim dismay that this same Mazelle had been an inmate of more prisons than one himself, and so had grown callous to many of their abominations. The man went on to tell how for three months he had lain in this town, traveling daily between the river and the *sôks* with his skin of earth-reddened water, waiting with a fine Oriental patience for a chance to come at Kettle, and gain speech with him.

The danger of death and torture which hung over him all this time was so obvious that he did not mention it. He recounted only his various attempts to get Kettle to that wicket in the prison through which the inmates were accustomed to thrust out skinny hands for daily alms, and to sell their miserable wares.

At length, after that three months of infinitely dangerous waiting, he saw his man. An emaciated Kettle came to the wicket, a man gaunt and fierce-eyed beyond description, yet carrying a certain spruceness still in spite of the unspeakable squalor of his surroundings. He was offering a mat he had

made, sailor-fashion, out of a chance found piece of old rope, either for sale, or in barter for food.

For this poor furniture Mazelle gravely bargained, in competition with other purchasers of prisoners' wares, and in the meanwhile, Kettle, who had recognized the man, and guessed his errand, wrestled with his poor diplomacy to find some message which would sound unsuspicious in the ears of bystanders.

At the same time he was forced, after the custom of the land, to cry up his wares. "Look well at the mat, O purchasers, a mat woven by the arts of the sea, a mat fit to honor the butt end of kaids." To which Mazelle would reply: "Observe this *cous cousoo,* made from the finest barley and the fattest sheep, and flavored with butter at least seven years of age. Observe when I stir it with my finger, thus. Observe how splendid is the fatness of that joint of tail. Smell at it, unbeliever, smell!"

At last the purchase was made, and the mat was handed over for the consideration of a bowl of rancid-smelling stew, and the little sailor, in his scanty Arabic, delivered himself thus:

"O purchaser, may Allah's favor increase on you! If you have a master, tell him quickly of the mat that he may come here and himself feel desire for another like it."

"O prisoner," said Mazelle, giving a final twist

up to his turban before going away, "O prisoner, I will seek my master, and tell him—and with that, O Excellency-with-the-great nose," he added, on reporting this account to Fenner, "I left the town and ran down the great valley to you here in Casadir above the sea, eating from the country as I came."

"You don't seem to have thriven very much on it," said Fenner, looking at the man's thin, worn face and ragged, stained jelab.

"I earned six wounds on the way," said Mazelle simply, "from those who would have forbidden me food. Had the message been from another, and to another, I should not have found spirit to carry it through."

"Honor shall be done you for this," said Fenner warmly, "in a way that will surprise you. In the meanwhile, take this rifle which will throw eight bullets further than a man can see, and that without reloading."

Mazelle eyed the weapon doubtfully.

"May your Excellency's cough be eternally relieved. But the gun has a long English stock, and I could not use it for powder play."

"I will send the gun down to an armorer in the bazaar, and he shall fit to it a short stock to your liking, with a heel-plate a span and a half in length, and decorate it choicely with ivory and metals."

"*Slamma,*" said Mazelle, brimming over into many smiles. "May your Excellency sit hereafter upon happiness, and have children more in number than the hairs of your servant's beard."

"There, there," said Fenner testily, "that will do," and went out to there and then arrange about a punitive expedition. Any reference to children always irritated him. He was a man who yearned for the joys of domesticity, but consumption forbade him ever to think of marriage.

This capture of Captain Kettle, though entirely unexpected, was by no means untypical of the general restlessness of Southern Morocco. With the assistance of Kettle, Fenner, and—in a less degree—of Mr. McTodd, the Kaid of Casadir, Hadj Mohammed Bergash, had brought his rebellion against the Sultan to a successful end. The imperial troops had been driven away, killed, or induced to change allegiance; caravan trade had come in with a rush; the port had been declared open; and the three assisting British had got a monopoly of the carrying trade overseas, and a large merchanting business in London and Europe. Success had apparently arrived all in a day's time.

But presently the usual Oriental hinderers began to assert themselves with grim, red persistency. With the restarting of the caravans, there was a res-

urrection of those who lived by looting them. The local robber barons in their hilltop castles sent word to the camel trains that they had recruited their garrisons, and demanded tolls for keeping the peace of the road; the confidence men, the beggars, the saints, and the other parasites dropped the various kinds of work they had been forced into during the days the caravans were interrupted, and with sighs of relief took up again the lighter task of sponging on travelers; and local highwaymen again sat beside each his old section of road, to point out to the solitary wayfarer how much safer he would have been as a unit of one of the larger convoys.

In the *sôk* outside the walls of Casadir men talked these things over in high-flavored Arabic, not, be it observed, pointing them out as a scandal, but merely as an unfailing evidence of good, sound trade.

It was over this nicety that Captain Kettle made his mistake. Said he, after the particularly atrocious cutting-up of one camel train: "This has got to stop. I'll make this Sus valley as safe as Wharfedale, where I live when I am at home, and where my missis and girls are to-day."

The Sheik Bergash spread out two elegant, small, brown hands. "It is the custom, and it always has been the custom with these Berbers. Even the Romans could not stop it when they were here.

Moreover, if these fighting men now spread out by handfuls in the castles, and singly along the road, were put out of employ by an armed force, they would presently gather together to assert their rights, and perhaps attack Casadir."

"Those we handle," said Kettle grimly, "will cause very little further trouble to anybody."

"They'd take an awful lot of catching," said Fenner, "and it might lead to complications. Much better wink at things till we're a bit more firmly established here."

But Kettle stuck doggedly to his point. "I've seen the chap that didn't get killed in this last cutting-up. The brutes had lopped the hands and feet from every mother's son of them, and left them to crawl in here as best they could. I don't say anything about these road-agents ruining them; I've been ruined myself heaps of times, and always pulled through somehow; but mutilation's another tune, and I'm going to stop it. By James, yes! I don't ask you two to chip in. Anyway, Sheik, you're wanted here to run the show, and you, boy, must stay to have cargoes ready for McTodd, when he brings the steamboat round. Besides, there's your soft lung to consider. No, I'm the man to arrange these funerals, and we'll call that settled, please, and change the subject."

In this determination then, Captain Owen Kettle had set out from Casadir, and leaving the seacoast behind him, had worked his way up the valley of the Sus River. He had with him a band of men so nicely regulated in size that in the first place they did not attract conspicuous attention, and in the second, they would be able to turn the tables on any attack. Moreover, they were armed with Marlin rifles, which could fire eight shots in eight seconds, and as the local long-barreled flintlock only fires its eight shots per hour, this gave them a fine advantage.

With the help of this following Kettle swept the trade routes with a merciless severity. The men he caught were a hindrance to the development of the country, and incidentally they were murderers. They expected execution, and he gave it them; but to provide them with a better chance of the hereafter, he offered to each the consolations of religion as prescribed by the Wharfedale Particular Methodists. It was a cause of chronic sorrow to him that these should be uniformly rejected.

Indeed, had he come across one who promised conversion, I believe the little sailor would there and then have presented him with a plenary pardon out of sheer respect to his faith. But the Moor in this thing is consistent. He renounces his creed for no persuasion, human or divine; and the detail of being

killed is always so near to him that it fails in convincingness as an argument.

Captain Kettle's men, then, divided head after head from their corresponding trunks, stuck these on posts beside the trails at about the height of a camel-rider's face, and with their Moorish humor wrote beneath each—"The above has gone out of business."

The wit appealed to the wayfarers' sense of fun, but with that curious Oriental inversion of ideas which the Northerner finds it so hard to follow, the act did not touch their gratitude. Indeed, from his very first interference in the valley of Sus, Captain Kettle made himself disliked. In England they have grown out of sympathy with the professional highwayman, but in Southern Morocco they recognize him as an institution. Periodically, of course, they shoot him themselves, or mutilate him, or avoid him as the chance arises; but there is no doubt that they take a melancholy pride in their local dangers. They are a conservative people.

Finally, Kettle set the crown on his blunders by shooting out of hand a certain Hossein, whom he caught in the act and article of crucifying a comparative stranger. The said Hossein was an old-established nuisance of the roads, and Kettle had been after him for some time; indeed, they had more than once been in close enough touch to exchange mes-

sages of defiance; and anyway his culminating atrocity, in which Kettle caught him red-handed, was quite ugly enough to warrant any punishment.

Remained the objection that Hossein was both Hadj and Sidi. Of course to Kettle the mere fact that the man had done the Mecca pilgrimage was nothing in his favor, and the accident of his descent from an ancestor who once had been named saint by the Mohammedan creed, was a trifle worthy of no consideration at all. But to the country at large here was sacrilege. The man was shot accurately enough, but even Kettle's own immediate following refrained from elevating his head on the usual pole; indeed, buried the body undecapitated, after the due washing which ritual ordains; and would have built a shrine above it if Kettle had not angrily interfered and struck camp forthwith.

But other eyes were watching, and other hands did the building, and when he came by that way a month later, there was the shrine, dome-roofed and glittering under the sunshine in its new suit of whitewash. Inside was a tenant, half priest, half trader; a couple of criminals were already in sanctuary; and a knot of business men from the neighborhood squatted round the walls, and boasted that they had made Sidi Hossein a geographical name, and the site of a weekly market.

Captain Owen Kettle felt annoyed. There is very little use in executing a criminal if the very people you are trying to protect treasure his memory in this way, and raise a sainthouse above him, largely for the protection of other criminals. So for half an hour he let his bitter tongue have full play upon everybody within reach, and in that space of time stirred up some unnecessary enmity.

As a consequence, those who called themselves honest men lent a good deal of practical sympathy to the thieves who were already banded together against him, and the Sus valley became for the little sailor a more dangerous place than even he imagined it.

The method of his final undoing was simple and ingenious. A sham fight was got up between a band of the country farmers and one of the fortified robber castles, whose garrison, under the guidance of their chief, Ayoob Bushaib, was notorious for its raids on the merchandise trains. The men of agriculture were by arrangement the victors, and down they came with much firing of guns and display of horsemanship to a dry *wad* where Kettle was encamped in the shade. They hailed him as Protector of all Merchants; told him how his example had spurred them to a little effort of their own; told further how their attempt had met with brilliant suc-

cess; and, finally, invited him to come and take over their prisoners, and execute them according to his own tastes.

As though to give full color to their story, heads were produced, newly severed, though, of course, this to an Oriental would have gone for little. Any one who knows Southern Morocco can bear evidence that human life is horribly cheap, and that the Moor sticks at little to put the full ingredient of reality into his play. But Captain Kettle, in spite of his vast education, was still a Northerner, and the dripping heads convinced him.

"You'll understand clearly," said he, "that I don't approve of you outsiders taking the law in your own hands, especially when I'm around. You'll please notice also that I've undertaken to keep order in this section of Morocco, and any one who looks on can see I'm doing it. You ought to have come down here to my camp and laid your complaint, and then I'd have mopped up Ayoob Bushaib and his castle-load of rogues before they could think. However, as you have interfered, I'll just ride up and see what sort of muddle you've made of it. No, you may take away those heads and bury them. I've no use for another man's bag."

Presently then, at the head of his own men, with a flanking escort of jubilant farmers, Kettle rode

out of the dry watercourse, and up through the argan forest above, skirting the green patches of barley, and making always for the high ground where the castle stood on a knoll.

He held along, entirely unsuspicious of the trap. He noted the frequent rootlings of pigs, and chided the farmers for not keeping them down; he watched with delight the lizards and butterflies, and once picked up a slow-moving grotesque chameleon, and set it to ride on his bridle-rein; and when now and again clouds of gleaming blue pigeons swept over him with a flicker of jeweled breasts, a verse or two of poetry came to his mind and gratified him exceedingly.

Ayoob Bushaib's castle, when they came to it, sprawled ungainly walls on the head of a steep knoll. It was built of amber-colored stone, and showed the usual specimen of patchwork piecemeal architecture. The outer gate, when they arrived up the last slope, lay open, and one of its valves, which was split with gunpowder, still smouldered on the ground. Within, the place was split up into the usual maze of courtyards and houses, tangled with camels, mules and cattle, creepy with the shrill cries of a ruffled harem. Here and there bodies lay —less the beforeseen heads. To a man whose recent months had been filled with the taking of similar

strongholds, the evidences of a storm were plain enough.

But as they went through the alleys and courtyards, their escort insensibly dwindled, shouldered aside, as it seemed, by Kettle's own truculent following; and when at last they poured out into the central courtyard of all, which was also littered with the red *débris* of recent fighting, all the farmers had left them.

Then there was a quick snapping of shots, and promptly every open door around them was slammed by hidden janitors, and bars ground noisily into the stone sockets. From the loopholes of the walls, from the iron-latticed windows, from behind the parapets of the roofs above, of a sudden there bristled forth the brass-strapped barrels of long Moorish guns, which belched their uncouth missiles with deadly aim, and men were shot dead at such close range that their haiks and jelabs were set on fire by the discharges.

Kettle went down, hit in the head by the first volley, and the rest was massacre. Again and again the guns of the castle's garrison were reloaded and fired, till at last the frenzied survivors below piled bodies together, escaladed the roof, and so won a temporary escape. But a merciless hunt followed on the heels of these, and one by one they were cut

down, or surrendered into slavery. Their animals also and camp furniture were captured. Of all the company the man Mazelle was the only soul who kept his life and freedom.

Then came the hour of triumph, and Ayoob Bushaib was far too good a Moor to refrain from making the most of it. Many of his own friends had passed through Kettle's hands, and had been associated with those grim Arabic notes which told that "the above had gone out of business." Well, Ayoob Bushaib had spikes above his own gateways and corner towers, and these were quickly emptied of former occupants, and as quickly dressed with fresher trophies.

"There is exactly one prophet," said Ayoob Bushaib, as he meditated over the grisly array, "and he looks carefully after us, who are his own. These men belonged to the Sheik Hadj Mohammed Bergash of Casadir, but their sending was none of his. The Sheik knows the ways of the road, and respects old customs. Their coming was due to the swine of Inglees, who are now his advisers. They are good men, these Inglees, but they are not perfect, and that is because they are of the N'zaranee faith. None can be perfect who does not acknowledge a single Allah and his one Prophet. But where is this Reis Keetle that fell to-day?

I do not see his red beard among these other ornaments."

He went carefully over the heads again, but could not find the one he looked for among them, and was just about to diagnose witchcraft and get uneasy, when word was brought to him that the man lived.

"I was just about to strike his head off, Excellency," said the messenger, "when the infidel opened his eyes and swore at me; and such was the power of his eye that I—I came to ask if your Excellency had any further orders concerning him."

"Is the man heavily wounded?"

"I am no hakim, but I should say not. A shot ploughed the side of his temple and stunned him, but he is a man of spare habit, and moreover a fighting man, and his flesh will know how to make for itself a quick cure."

"He shall be cured," said Ayoob Bushaib, with a wave of the hand, "and presently he shall acknowledge that Allah is Allah, and that Mohammed is his prophet. After that he shall stay among us and tell here of the cleverness of the N'zaranees, which he learned when he was a dog of a N'zaranee himself. In the meanwhile, as he knows nothing of the joys of Paradise which will await him after conversion, leg-irons, wrist-irons and a chain to the

waist will keep him from escaping, and keep him also at peace."

Now Ayoob Bushaib was a man of some intellect, and though he had taken every precaution lest any of Kettle's following should escape, and, not knowing about Mazelle, thought he had done this effectively, still from old experience he knew how news will leak out. He took it for granted, then, that the tale of Kettle's overthrow would in time drift to the Atlantic coast of Morocco, and reach Casadir, and a campaign of rescue and revenge would promptly follow. He knew that his own isolated fortress could never hold out against the strong attack of a big force, and so he preferred to insure its safety by sending the prisoner to a town in the next valley, which was better prepared, both in population and defences, for a heavy attack.

It was to this town, then, that Mazelle had followed his late leader, and had taken over the business of the water-carrier, and though he had seen and reported on the weight of poor Kettle's fetters, the squalor of the common prison, and the straits to which he was put to avoid actual starvation, he had not even guessed at the greatest of all the little man's dangers and discomforts.

Ayoob Bushaib, when not acting the robber baron in his hilltop castle elsewhere, was a considerable

man in this town away in the depths of Southern Morocco, a farmer of lands on its outskirts, an owner of camels, the lord of warehouses, and a dweller in a great substantial house, with inclosed gardens and a spacious harem. He was a man of the world—his own small world, that is—and a man, moreover, who understood men—that is, men of the type he lived among. Also, like all Moors, he had a high appreciation of the horrors of the Moorish prison system.

He had taken Kettle's measure with some accuracy. As the prisoner dragged his chains along beside the camels, Ayoob Bushaib had noted his strong, masterful face, and decided that here was no convert to take up the comforts of the Koran on a first invitation. So he made up his mind to mortify his captive's flesh pretty thoroughly before beginning upon him.

Into the common prison then the little sailor was thrown. There were as many innocent men there as rogues, but yaws, fever, dysentery, beri-beri, and the other diseases of the country smote among them all with an impartial hand. From one filthy tank all could drink—or thirst. There was no prison ration. All were gaunt with starvation, and each day saw a death. Only the ingenuity of despair made the poor wretches produce the humble handi-

work, which now and again they were able to peddle at the prison wicket for squalid bowls of broken food.

For four horrible baking months Ayoob let these discomforts sink in, watching his man narrowly the while, and at the end of that he fetched him out, and left him chained for half a day to a pillar in one of the garden courtyards of his house. Then he came and interviewed him.

"Thus we deal with dogs," said Ayoob Bushaib, "N'zaranee dogs."

"Then more shame to you for not knowing how to treat animals properly," said Kettle.

"I see that I have brought you out of prison too soon. You are not ready for a comfortable life again yet. I must send you back again for another four months till your brain ripens into intelligence."

Now I think it is nothing to poor Kettle's discredit that he quailed almost visibly at this. The horrors of that ghastly prison had nearly killed him as it was; another four months of them would be unendurable; and, besides, there was a very small chance of his surviving such a spell. So with an effort he got his bitter tongue under control, and spoke to the Moor civilly.

"If you have any offer to make, sir, please let me hear it. I'm not very well just now, so you must kindly excuse my temper!"

"If you are reasonable, Reis Keetle, and do as I wish, presently you shall have a house of your own, and slaves, and, if you wish, wives; and, in fact, every comfort, and be nursed into health again."

The little man bit back his temper with an effort.

"If marrying a lot of Moorish women is part of the contract, you can stop right there. I've got one wife at home on the farm in Wharfedale, and she's all I shall ever want, God bless her. So I'll trouble you not to make any more of your nasty bigamous propositions to me."

Ayoob Bushaib shrugged his shoulders. "That is not essential, and if it please you we will drop that point. I did but offer you what most men want. But, as I say, once you are free, you may suit yourself entirely on that matter."

"You'd better get to the point, sir, and let me know your conditions. You've got me in a tight place, I know, and are able to ask big terms. I suppose you're wanting an order on my firm in Casadir for cash. Well, within reason I will pay. But, mind you, don't ask too much. I've made a bit of money lately, I'll grant. But I've the missis and the girls to think of, and sooner than bring them down to beggary again, where they've been so often before, I'll just refuse to pay you a single peseta, and let you do your ugliest."

"Tut, tut, you're taking me quite wrongly. I'm not asking you to ruin yourself. I'm not asking for a ransom at all. Indeed, I'm offering you a boon, if you will accept it with your freedom conjointly."

"You make me tired. Get your offer out and let me be off back to jail."

Ayoob Bushaib smiled blandly. "You refuse to believe in my good faith, but I assure you it is quite genuine. Throw off your cursed N'zaranee superstition, turn Mussulman, and once you have been to the mosque and said the appointed prayers, you shall be free, rich, prosperous, and can look forward with steady assurance to one of those high seats in Paradise hereafter which are specially set apart for those who see the pitfalls in their old ways."

"What, you deliberately ask me—*me*—to turn Mohammedan?"

"And I think that, being a sensible man, and having tasted prison, you will do it."

"I'll see you in hell if I do," snapped the little man fiercely. "And that's not swearing. It's a solid theological fact. Send for your niggers to cast off this chain, and let me get back to jail. The stink there is pretty bad, but I prefer it to here. Your breath's just poisonous."

"I give commands here," said Ayoob Bushaib placidly, and clapped his hands. "You must not

suppose that the choice of everything will rest with you. Indeed, the matter may turn out quite unexpectedly for you." Servants came, and he gave several orders. Presently they returned. One filled and handed to his master a pipe of keef, which another lit. Others brought an ax, a block, and a dish of glowing charcoal, with searing irons in it. Others unchained Captain Kettle from the pillar, stretched him on the floor—three to each limb—so that there was no possibility of struggling.

Then one slipped the block below his right leg, and another stood by with ax upraised.

Ayoob Bushaib took up the smoke from the keef in two pleasurable whiffs, and for awhile seemed to detach himself from the day's affairs. Then he came back to them again, and addressed Kettle in his usual placid tones.

"In Paradise the houris look askance at a man whose limbs are mutilated. Now I am going to convert you, Reis Keetle, to the true faith, and I am a man of much patience. If you refuse me now, presently I shall lop off a limb. Then I will give you a while to consider while the stump heals. Then will come another offer, and, if there is another refusal, off will go another limb. And so on. You take me?"

"Yes, I do, you son of a dog, and you may cut

me up into bits an inch square before I'll so much as think of taking over your blighted religion. Do you know who you're talking to? Do you know I'm the man that founded the Wharfedale Particular Methodists? Do you think that after going to the trouble and expense of making up a creed for them, and being, so to speak, their head organizer when at home, I should change my membership with them for any other bally religion under the sun? No, sir, I'm in Morocco for business, and lately you may say I've been doing police work, and the affairs of the W. P. M. have been in abeyance. But I'm a member of that sect all the time, and its principal missionary, and don't you forget it."

Ayoob Bushaib signed for another pipe of keef, and took its two whiffs slowly. "Is that your last word?" he asked.

"It is, unless you'll let me offer you a prospectus of a religion that will take you up to heaven when your time comes without any mistake or error. W. P. M. is a sure guarantee. May I tell you about it?"

Ayoob Bushaib gave a sign, and the ax fell, cutting through bone and flesh with one sharp *crunch.* Then the man at the brazero took out his searing irons and dressed the stump.

. . . . . .

A weak and shattered Kettle was being slowly nursed to health by a specially appointed slave. He was still in the prison, but not now in the common courtyard. He was given a small room of his own, with a space of roof to take the air upon. This was the arrangement of Ayoob Bushaib, who was a persevering man. He wanted Kettle as an assistant and co-religionist, and thought that with patience he saw his way to attaining these matters, if he could keep the patient alive while the process of persuasion continued.

But Kettle, though weak in body, was still very active in mind. His leg was lost beyond recovery. But life remained, and other limbs were also his, and he did not intend to be deprived of any of these if it could be avoided. So before the attendant slave he let the lethargy of illness be plainly shown, and his thin, drawn face was a very effective mask for the active brain which lay behind.

Up till now he had despised his fellow prisoners, and failed to see how they could be of use to him. But now a scheme came to him, and he dragged himself among them and to one after another told his plot. They, poor wretches, were as desperate as he, but they were uninventive. Any leader always appealed to such as they if only he offered revenge, and this one promised more besides. They were a

large force; presently they would gather malcontents from the town and be larger; and then when the town was theirs they would loot it, oh, so enjoyably. They licked their lips at the prospect.

Thanks to the laxity of Moorish prison arrangements, arms could be bought at the wicket as readily as food, provided one had the wherewithal to pay, and so some weapons came in this way, and others were manufactured.

But the programme, whatever it might be, was suddenly put on one side by another. Ayoob Bushaib came to the prison to see for himself how matters went with his would-be proselyte.

He had with him an armed guard, certainly, of two men, but these, anticipating no danger from the cowed wretches in the prison, walked carelessly. As a consequence, when the wicket was shut, and the word given, they were disarmed and stunned with the same ease with which Ayoob himself was gagged and bound.

It grieves me a great deal to break the continuity of the story at this point, but, on what followed next, Kettle himself flatly refused to give me details; and Mazelle, my other informant, could not. Certainly there was some talk between Kettle and Ayoob of religion, "a N'zaranee religion"—and I somehow guess this to be "W. P. M."—and the rest of

the rebellious prisoners demurred. But Kettle rode over their objections with a high hand.

I fancy also that Ayoob Bushaib was given the alternatives of 'vert or lop. But of this I can get absolutely no confirmation. The only thing that leads me to imagine that affairs so befel, was the undoubted fact that Ayoob's right leg came off in the prison on that particular date. I should very much like to have been certain on this point, but Kettle was not to be drawn. To tell the truth, he snapped at me.

Anyway, there was Ayoob a captive and disabled, and the prisoners suddenly converted into a body of very desperate men, holding an immensely strong fortress right in the middle of the town. And to make matters worse, there were strong rumors that another, and far more dangerous, enemy, was marching against the town from the outside.

The prisoners as a first demand asked for food, and, as they held out the alternative of setting fire to the prison and incidentally to the town, they got it. Then they declared their rebellion as Heaven-guided, asked for recruits, and got these also. And after this they would have been quite content to sit quiet, and experience the unwonted pleasure of having a full meal. But here that energetic person, Kettle, asserted himself more pointedly, and sent

out a demand for tribute in cash or negotiable goods. Here the townspeople drew the line (as might have been expected); a siege was started; and with mad hate to spur either side, there were ugly casualties. But by degrees, as those who held the prison were not taken, public opinion, an easy thing to sway in these Oriental towns, swerved round to their side. Men flocked to them, turning their backs on the legitimate Governor, coming over to Kettle merely because they discerned in him the rising power. And all this time, the rumors of an invader appearing before the gates became more strong.

At last the desperate street fighting came to a sudden end. A truce was called. The other side were open to negotiations. A common enemy had approached from outside, and the only hope of salvation was to amalgamate. And the opposite party offered entire command to this successful rebel, this conquering prisoner, el Reis Keetle.

He took over the command with the truculent remark that he would have helped himself to it if it had not been offered, and then proceeded to tell that the army which even then was sitting down before the walls and commencing siege operations, was sent by his own friends. He pointed out the Excellency-with-the-great-nose, Fenner of the cough;

he showed them McTodd, the famous fighting man, and Mazelle, who had slipped through their fingers and carried the news to Casadir; and then he told them that there should be no sack of the place, and that all should be forgiven on their promise to amend their ways and stick strictly to business.

After that he went to have another private interview with Ayoob Bushaib.

"Now, my man," said he, "you've had the creed of the Wharfedale Particular Methodists explained to you, chapter and verse, sufficient times. Has my preaching gone home to you, or do you wish to shed another leg?"

"One question," said the placid Ayoob. "Do you expect to go to your heaven yourself?"

"Such is my trust."

"As you stand?"

Kettle flushed. "On one leg do you mean, you skunk?"

"Yes."

"Certainly I do."

"Then one leg makes no difference in your heaven?"

"Not an inch."

"Then I will come, too. In the Moslem Paradise a man with one leg is not sought after by the houris. I am your convert."

"Well," said Kettle judicially, "you're not a very promising specimen, but you are the only one I have gathered in all Morocco, so far, and so I must make the best of you. I'll attend to the rest of your spiritual needs later on. For the present I must go outside the walls and talk to my friends." He sighed rather sadly. "It will be pretty bad to have to tell them that I shall never kick any one with my right leg again."

CHAPTER XI.

LIMITED FREE TRADE.

THERE are no makers of artificial limbs in Southern Morocco, though if one were to set up, he would drive a flourishing trade. But Mr. N. A. McTodd was a man of quick resource. Within an hour of seeing Captain Kettle ride in maimed on his camel, and hobble into his Casadir house with the help of a crutch, he had measured his patient, and had drawn a plan of projected improvements in charcoal on a white-washed wall. Within a day he had rigged a lathe, and turned a wooden leg out of a piece of ash, smart enough (as he said himself) for royalty.

It was colored white for the sake of cool appearance, and was shod with a heavy cast-brass toe, expressly guaranteed to resist wear. "For Saturday nights and Sundays," said McTodd, "I'm going to turn ye a leg of mahogany, which I'll get a gunmaker in the bazaar to inlay with ivory and mother-o'-pearl. But that'll no' be a piece of furniture to knock about carelessly. So I'll trouble ye to learn your steps on this less meretricious instrument

which I've designed for everyday wear. What's it you've done to Fenner? The boy's lost half his flush and all his cough, and his nose has grown bigger than ever. He gives his orders right and left like an admiral, and the humorous thing is I find myself taking them with never a question; and ye'll note when ye watch, that so do others."

Captain Kettle chose and lit a fresh cigar. "That boy's grown, Mac, in a way that makes me proud. He's no strength, he's the poorest kind of shot, he's no command of language as either you or I understand it; but there's something about him that makes men prick their ears when he talks, and then go right off and do what's been said. It's a funny thing, too, to see how fond he is of kids. If he can get two or three youngsters round him to play with, and laugh with, and give presents to, he's as happy as a girl with a new hat. But the rum thing is," the little man added thoughtfully, "that directly he's gone from them, he seems to turn savage against his luck, and just tears into his work as though that kept him from thinking of other things."

"I've noticed," said McTodd, scratching his nose with a black finger nail, "I've noticed, Skipper, that there are men whose great idea in life is marriage and a family. I've had few ambeetions in that direction mysel'. There have been one or two ladies

that kept apartments, who, I'll own, have attracted me; but not for long. Besides, between ourselves (and there's few that will have guessed it), I've always had the whiskey to contend with."

"It's a great pity," said Kettle thoughtfully, "that there are so many drunkards and teetotalers in the world. Intemperate men like those are the curse of whiskey—— Hullo, here's the boy. Boy, you shouldn't go about at that pace with your sore lung."

Fenner swung into the room panting, tipped himself on to a divan, and mopped his bony forehead and his hectic cheeks. "Confound you, Skipper, let my ailment alone! I'm not dead yet by a long chalk, and I honestly believe my chest is mending. I've only had one go of coughing the whole of this morning in spite of the sand storm that's blowing."

"That," said Kettle, "is the result of that Chest Reviver patent medicine which I recommended, and which you were so scornful about. I think you ought to write to the inventor, and very likely he may publish your letter on his next wrappers."

"Well, well, the result's the thing, and the process doesn't matter. As for the letter, I'll get you to do that, and turn it into poetry if you like. Composition's not my strong point. But I just must have health and strength now. There's trouble on ahead with the Kaid."

"Kaid Who?" said Kettle bristling. "I left Sheik Hadj Mohammed Bergash in command here in Casadir, and if he's made any one Kaid and put that man above himself, it's been done without my permission."

"Hadj Mohammed has made himself Kaid. He made the announcement a week ago, and had a powder play and a big sheep killing to honor it. He's a fine horseman, is our Mr. Bergash, and a bit of theatrical powder play is just the thing to show off his points. It seems a rumor soaked down to the coast here about ten days ago that there had been another scuffle up-country, and that neither you nor I would ever turn up again. I can imagine he bore the prospective loss with equanimity. He's a shifty devil, our Mr. Bergash. While we've been away, there's been one French steamer in and two German, and he's been flirting with all three."

Captain Kettle started up on the divan, and held out a hand. "Here, Mac, help me to ship this wooden leg. I've got business at the Sheik's house. I guess I'll bring that man down to main deck level before he's an hour older. A Kaid is he, by James? Here's promotion."

"Hold on," said Fenner. "Let's hear exactly what you're going to do first. Our dear friend Bergash is not quite a fool. He's guessed there might

be ructions this morning, and he's ready for them."

"How do you know that?"

"He's doubled his own private guard since last night. My man told me his house is just bristling with soldiers, and they aren't armed with seven-foot gas pipes, either. The excellent Bergash has had a taste for collecting Winchesters lately, and I guess he's quite enough to go around, and won't be afraid to use them. No need to put your head into another wasp's nest."

The little sailor flushed. "Mr. Fenner," he said stiffly, "I don't see there was any occasion to bring that up against me. I got caught by Ayoob Bushaib, I know, and it cost me a leg. I'm a bally tripod now, if you like to put it that way. But I've got through most kinds of tight places in the past, and I don't know I'm any more nervous than I used to be. So I'll trouble you to shut your mouth about my bit of misfortune."

"Now look here, Skipper, drop it. I'm not going to quarrel with you on any terms whatever. I admire you far too much. If you'd like an apology, you can have one. But I do want badly to know what you intend to do."

"Shove Hadj Mohammed off his perch, and take his place."

"That is, Casadir is going to be governed by Kaid Kettle."

"Well," said the little man stiffly, "and please why not? Hadj Mohammed's not straight, and I am; I speak the language quite well enough; and when it comes to handling men, why, there I back myself against any one at present in Africa."

"Man Kettle," said McTodd warmly, "I think ye'd make a fine Kaid. Ye're sound on the whiskey question, and ye've other points as well. If you care to sign on this afternoon, I'll be there to hold the inkbottle, and see no one interferes."

"Ye-es," coughed Fenner, 'it's all very nice, and I've no doubt, Skipper, that if you make up your mind to a *coup d'état,* you'd bring one off. I can promise that in the event of trying it you should have my help. But it isn't only a case of grabbing Casadir and holding it in the teeth of a pack of fighting Moors. Once you set up as Kaid of Casadir, and that means King of the Sus country as well, you'll have Europe down about our ears without any delay. Now you can't fight Europe."

"I've had most of Europe against me before," said the sailor truculently, "and I took my steamboat where she was ordered in spite of the lot of them."

"Quite so. But with a steamer you can dodge

about. Unfortunately Casadir is at moorings, and any one knows where to find it when it's wanted."

McTodd rubbed a pair of large, discolored hands. "Let 'em come. To quote a vairse o' the Skipper's poetry, 'Let 'em all come.' For what have we got two steamers of war, and a four-point-seven gun fixed here in position, not to mention other articles of offence? I want to see those earning their living."

Fenner mopped at his face with a wet pocket handkerchief. "Dash it all, let's be practical! The two steamers of war are merely old tramps that no British surveyor would pass; the four-point-seven has all its rifling rusted away, and from the look of the breech-block, I don't believe it's safe to fire at all; and the other guns are equally footling. The outfit was intended to scare off the Sultan of Morocco, and it served that purpose well enough. But don't let's humbug ourselves that we could stand for ten minutes against a civilized power. One fourth-rate gunboat could settle our hash here in less than twenty-five minutes, and we couldn't so much as splinter her paint."

"I hate to give in," said Kettle reluctantly. "But you're right. I suppose you've got one of your usual schemes to offer us now?"

"I have and I haven't. I can give you the theory

of a practical scheme, but as usual you'll have to be the man to carry it out. Here's the case: you and I and Mac came to Casadir at a tight time, and helped its boss to make himself independent of the Sultan of Morocco. As a reward for that we got from him a concession in writing that all the export trade was to pass through our hands."

"I told you at the time, boy, it wasn't worth the paper it was written on."

"It was only intended to wave in the faces of the Great Powers when international complications begin to arise. That's the only thing you see that gives us *locus standi.* But Hadj Mohammed Bergash doesn't see as far as that, and, as regards the value, presently we're going to prove to him where his mistake comes in. But he's not acted quickly enough. In the meantime we've got the trade and all the trade connections fast enough in our own hands, we haven't been skinning any one unduly, and all the solid men in the country are on our side. We've brought 'em prosperity. I don't say they are grateful. A Moor is too good a Mohammedan to be ever grateful to an Englishman——"

"Man, I'd like to tell ye in confidence I'm no' exactly English. D'ye see, Ballindrochater, where I come from, is——"

"Say Britisher, if it pleases you, Mac, and that

takes in all three of us. Anyway, we've as much liking from these people as any men of our breed could get, and that's a very comfortable asset. Now, what we've got to do is to make Hadj Mohammed see this, and rub into him the great truth that if we give the word he's to be pulled off his perch, pulled he'll be. At the same time we must studiously avoid an open outbreak. Kaid he's made himself, and Kaid—in name—he may continue to be. So far as I am concerned he may call himself Prince, or Sultan, or Emperor, if a title tickles him. But he's got to clearly understand that the real man at the head of affairs is King Owen the First."

"I see," said Kettle. "And he must hand over to these German and French agents, who have landed here, sharp orders to move on again, and we won't appear in the matter."

"No, no, man. That would give them a cause of action against us at once, and it's probably the very thing their Governments were trying for."

"What, do you mean to say they were sent here as a sort of bait, and not for business at all?"

"It's quite likely. But in the meanwhile we're not going to march into that sort of trap. We deport no Europeans, and furthermore we do not allow Hadj Mohammed to deport them. On the contrary,

we've opened the port, and we welcome French, Germans, Italians, Austrians, yes, even Belgians. But—we must see to it they do no trade. The export trade, as vide concession, is ours and indivisible. On that point, I guess, we're all quite sound, eh, Mac?"

"It's awful how the taste for money grows on men, even Scotchmen. I'm quite the financier now in London"—the engineer preened himself—"I've a fur coat. I've a tall hat rubbed round with an oily rag, and spit-leather boots. It's a very humorous costume if you come to think of it. There was one Jew wanted me to ship a diamond ring. But I can no' see that outlay is needful, even for a financier. Eh, Fenner, if you could see me sitting in a first-class hotel, drinking whiskey at ninepence the glass, that I could get equally good for threepence elsewhere, ye'd never fling it in my teeth again that I'm no' adaptable. But, man, if you only knew how I sigh sometimes for pajamas, and just the feel of a fistful of cotton waste, ye'd pity me. By gosh, what's yon?"

From below came the sudden bang of shots, and the high scream of a hurt man, and in an instant the house buzzed with the noise of shouts and threats, and the rustle of weapons. Captain Kettle had pulled out a revolver with the quickness of a con-

juror, and McTodd produced a heavy three-quarter inch spanner from his jacket pocket.

"That," said Fenner, "is Hadj Mohammed paying a call on us before we can call on him. He's a sharp man, our Kaid Bergash."

"I'll twist the tail of that treacherous swine in a way he won't like," snapped Kettle. "Put down that rifle, boy. You couldn't hit a haystack with it. Take that shotgun and plenty of cartridges. You take a shotgun, too, Mac. Now come out, the pair of you. All we've got to do is to murder the lot of them down in the courtyard. They can't get up. Our own men are holding the stair."

Bang! Bang! Crash! came the shots, and a bullet flicked into the room where they sat and shelled down a great flake of plaster.

"Hold on," said Fenner. "I don't see why we should play the Kaid's game. Why not try one of our own?"

"There's a fight going on just outside this door," said McTodd, "and that's good enough game for me."

"What's the alternative?" asked Kettle.

"Try the offensive, and leave the defensive to the other people. It's not new strategy. All the text books have it. And I think it's sound."

"*Bang! bang! bang!* went the shots. The court-

yard and its galleries were a pandemonium of noise. The thin acrid reek of black smoke drifted into the room where they stood.

"Now, quick," said Kettle, "and let's hear what's up your sleeve, boy. I wouldn't have waited as long as this outside a scrap for any other man living."

"Let's leave this house to our own fellows. They may hold it or they may not. Anyway, Hadj Mohammed's men are engaged here, and he isn't expecting us. It strikes me that if we pay him a call at his own residence just now, we may find him alone and disengaged."

"But how——?"

"Over the roofs. It's a solid block of houses between this and the Kaid's. The only thing I hesitate about is, can you climb, Skipper, now that you are crippled?"

"I could climb," retorted Captain Kettle unpleasantly, "a dashed sight better with both legs off than you ever could with all you've got, and a tail thrown in. Come on."

A staircase led upward out of the next room, and they were very quickly up on the roof. Before them were spread out the roofs of the city, a place of rectangular walled-in allotments, sliced up into strips by the deep dykes of the streets. The acrid reek of the powder followed them, and overhead, in the

hot cobalt of the sky, carrion birds collected; but the noise of the fight had already become more dim.

The path was not an easy one. The Moslem takes the evening air on the roof with his womenkind, and sees to it that he is neither overlooked nor raided. He has a fine taste in white precipitous walls, and imports glass bottles to decorate their crests; and occasionally his ideas run to iron *chevaux de frise* of many points. But the travelers picked up a pole to help them in the worst escalades, and found a rope which eased the more lengthy of the descents.

McTodd led. Fenner came second, panting and sweating. Kettle brought up the rear. The other two would have helped the little sailor if he would have let them, but at each offer of assistance his vinegary tongue lashed out with such acidity that they not only let him alone, but pressed along at their quickest pace by way of showing to him if possible the extent of their own abilities.

In this way, then, Fenner and the engineer were two roofs ahead when an accident happened. On the brink of a spike-fringed wall Captain Kettle slipped; an iron prong ripped into his raiment and dived through the leather waist-belt that held the thigh-piece of his wooden leg, and there he dangled

like some absurd jumping-jack, using language that emulated the sky, both in warmth and color.

Promptly emerged from the roof-door a furious householder, raging with the idea that here was some Lothario in the act and article of coming to pay surreptitious court to his women-kind. The man lifted up his angry voice, and in those poetically coarse phrases to which Arabic so readily adapts itself, gave his opinion of Kettle's ancestry, his moral character, his lack of physical powers, and his probable future fate.

"Your wives be sugared, you trigamous son of a dog," Kettle shouted at him. "I wouldn't touch one of them with a ten-foot pole. You just wait till I get down, and I'll alter your face till your women will think it's a foot. Do you know who I am, you spawn of a sand storm? By James, I'm a man that has respect from every soul here in Casadir, and it doesn't do for them to forget it." This, also, was in classical Arabic, and of necessity loses much of its fragrant beauty in translation.

The Moor on the subject of his women is a man of the touchiest humor, and this householder was no exception to the rule. He pulled the curved dagger from the sheath which hung from his neck, and made a rush.

At that precise moment Kettle had contrived to

squirm round and reach the buckle of his belt, and pull it adrift. The iron spike on the wall of course held stubbornly, but his thin, white, tropical clothes tore like so much paper. Worst misfortune of all, the white drill jacket pocket which held his revolver ripped completely out, and remained aloft on the spike, as securely out of immediate reach as though it had lodged in the moon.

Captain Kettle did not waste the impetus of his fall. He pushed himself out from the wall as the Moor rushed, and landed with his knees on that worthy man's shoulders. They both toppled to the floor together, the white wooden leg trundling after them, and it was this uncouth weapon that the little sailor seized. McTodd had turned it heavy and solid; an everyday leg, as he said; and the lower end was shod with a massive cap of brass.

The Moor's turban had come off in the tumble, and they rolled apart after the impact. But Kettle was up on his solitary foot as soon as the Moor had scrambled to his two; the wooden leg whirled aloft, and came down *whack* on the shaven skull; the man went over as if he had been poleaxed.

"I'll have you," said Kettle, "if you aren't too stunned, to understand that I'm a respectable man, and don't get over the garden wall to see any ladies whatever. You may thank your stars that Mrs.

Kettle is not likely to hear your remarks, or it's something worse than a broken comb I'd have given you for your impertinence."

He strapped the wooden leg once more in place, and as by this time Fenner and McTodd had come back to the rescue, he allowed them to dislodge the hung-up revolver with their pole.

"I thank you, Mac," he said humbly, "but it's a fact, I do feel naked without that gun. I wish I could raise a new coat. I hate going about in untidy rags like this."

"We'll charge all repairs to the Kaid," said Fenner. "The great thing is not to cause needless delay in handing him the bill."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the engineer. "Delay! Very humorous."

"By James," snapped Kettle, "don't you dare to he-haw at me, you dissolute mechanic. I'll thank you both to get on with the business in hand, and waste no more time with your cackle. We're only two roofs off Hadj Mohammed's house now."

Once more the straining run and climb recommenced, and the sun glared upon them, and their tiny dark blue shadows danced in the heat.

Behind them the noise of the fight had died away; ahead of them the Kaid's house seemed wrapped in dignified siesta.

Presently they came to it, and achieved the hardest of their climbs. Hadj Mohammed Bergash was rich, and he was cautious. The outer wall of his palace was high, so that his women-kind could overlook and not be overlooked. The pole would not reach. But the brawny Scot lifted it, and placed the heel on his head, and Kettle climbed to his shoulders, then up the pole, and so the crest of the wall, with the end of the rope over his arm. McTodd climbed up the rope. Fenner, who could not climb, was hauled up by the other two, and had his great beak of a nose badly scraped in the process. A minute later they had ushered themselves into the presence of the Kaid.

Now, in South Morocco, a man lives in the midst of alarms, and in this respect the highest of the land are more harassed than those of more lowly station. A man carries his weapons all day long and every day, eats with them, sleeps with them, and has them quite handy even when he is in the bath. As a consequence, Hadj Mohammed Bergash was quick enough on the draw to even excite the admiration of such a connoisseur in the matter as Captain Owen Kettle.

But the winning points in the exercise are adjudicated in decimals of a second, and Hadj Mohammed was expert enough to know when he was beaten.

He dropped his half-raised weapon, and stared placidly down the barrel of Captain Kettle's revolver.

"Allah is great," he remarked, "and He has but one prophet. I will hear what you have to say."

"Boy," said Kettle, "just take away his gun and cutlery."

Fenner did so.

"You might go through him again and see if he has any more."

Fenner did this, and produced another revolver and a curious knife.

"That," said Kettle, "is a Touareg back-thrust dagger, a very interesting piece. That's for jabbing a man who comes at you behind, and it's used by agriculturists in the slave-raiding districts. Hand it across. We haven't got one in our collection at home. I'll send that to Wharfedale to the Missis. I know she'll be pleased with it."

"Will you take green tea with mint in it," asked the Kaid, "or cooled sherbet?"

"I wonder," said Kettle acidly, "you don't offer us cooled cheek. That seems the brand you've most got on tap at present. It's Kaid they tell me that you call yourself now. I wonder you didn't make it Sultan while you were on at the job."

"I did think of it."

"The pit you did! By James, there's education

wanted here. Gratitude one did not look for, but I thought you'd know a better man than yourself when you saw one. You gave your word once that I was to be practical boss here."

"I gave you deference as such while you were here. But you departed from Casadir, and news came from the Sus country that you would not return. I cannot see," added Hadj Mohammed with a bland glance toward Kettle's wooden leg, "that you have altogether returned even yet."

The sailor started as if he had been stung, and his red torpedo beard bristled. "Now, understand clearly," he snapped, "that you've got on a subject about which I take sauce from no man living. If you dare to mention my leg again, I'll have off your turban, and smack you on the bald head, and then I'll clean the pipeclay off my shoes on to your whiskers. By James, if you've any doubt as to who's the read Kaid of Casadir, I'll set to work and teach you in a way you won't forget. I want respect from every Moor in this town, and don't you run away and fancy yourself a giddy exception."

Hadj Mohammed lowered his head to the carpet. "Reis Keetle, I bow to your wisdom."

"You couldn't do a wiser thing. Now I'd like to know what you meant by sending your scum of troops to raid our house?"

"It was unauthorized. It was a mistake, for which presently I will send you the heads of any offenders who survive for you to set above your gate."

"I'm not going to have them punished for merely carrying out your orders. No, Hadj Mohammed, you'll have to foot the bill yourself. Savvy that?"

"Allah is very great, and He only is merciful."

"Quite right. Mercy from me would be wasted on you just now. As you've chosen to make hay of our house, we'll just take over yours till you have repaired the damage."

The Moor's dark, strong face showed no change.

"To the powerful the victory comes, so the poet writes. The others shall be trodden upon, and if well advised they will not writhe, and so shall escape unnecessary hurt."

"I don't see where the poetry of that comes in," said Kettle doubtfully, "but the sentiment is all right."

"If I have your high permission, I will show you the rooms of the house which are now yours."

"Walk on," said Captain Kettle, and they all rose.

But here the Moor did a surprising thing. He got up, bowed meekly, went to the door, and opened it. He passed through it himself, turned with the agility of a monkey, and slammed it with such quickness,

that Kettle's ready bullet merely ripped a row of white splinters from the wood. The bolts shot into their sockets as they threw themselves against the barrier, and the door did not even quiver to their weight. It was a fine thick door.

They raged, all three of them, with furious wrath, but instinctively they all looked round the room.

It was a perfect trap. It was a bare white cube of a place, with one door, and three small windows set in high embrasures, so deep and so narrow that even the Southern Moroccan sun could only fill the room with a twilight. Heavy iron bars guarded these windows, and even while they made their inspection, shutters were clapped-to outside. Hadj Mohammed was a man who wasted no time.

But Captain Owen Kettle also was a fellow of infinite resource. To use his own phrase he was savage enough to have bitten into a cold chisel at the idea of being caught in such a trap, and he went *step-stumping* round the room, with every faculty strained to the uttermost.

"That old buck will keep us here to die of thirst," said McTodd. "It's a death," he added thoughtfully, "I've never contemplated since coming to my present degree of affluence."

"Much more likely," said Fenner, "to blow char-

coal fumes in from somewhere, and cook us that way."

"Dying be sugared," snapped Kettle. "I'm going to get out and twist Hadj Mohammed's tail. Look here. The floor's soft down here. My peg sinks into it, and the plaster shells away. Find something to quarry with, and we'll be through to the room below."

Each had a pocket knife, and they were promptly down on their knees, picking at the crumbling mortar. There was a six-inch layer of it, and then came the usual row of argan sticks, laid upon thicker baulks. These took longer to cut through, but once an opening was made, McTodd's large hands were soon able to tear the whole fabric away piecemeal. Then one by one they dropped through a store-room at the courtyard level.

Kettle was all for an immediate attack. He wished to find the man who had played this trick on them, and take prompt vengeance on him. But Fenner saw further ahead.

"Confound this lime dust," he coughed, "how it does make one choke! Look here, Skipper, we've gone through this once already. It would be awfully inconvenient if we had to kill Hadj Mohammed. It would be almost as bad if we were forced to shove him off his perch. But at the same time

we want to stop him from playing tricks on us once and for always."

"Yes, by James. That man seems to think he can keep his end up against me, and he's going to be shown where his error comes in."

"Well, wait a bit, and I'll show you a way it can be done effectively, and without a fuss. The method's one I dislike, but there appears no other way for it. Look out over that bale, through the doorway, and into the garden. Who's there?"

"Hadj Mohammed's little boy."

"He's the nicest kid in Casadir, and he's very fond of me, and I'm very fond of him. I've played with him many an hour. You know how jolly kids are?"

"Mine are girls," said the little sailor with a sigh. "But I can fancy that a man would be just as fond of his youngsters if they are boys."

"That one is all Hadj Mohammed's got, since his other son died, and he's just as proud of him as he can stick. Well, Skipper, we must take the boy as a hostage."

"Of course we shouldn't hurt him under any circumstances."

"Of course not; do you think I'm a cannibal? But the mere having him would ensure present good behavior on behalf of the Kaid. To keep his Excellency on the paths of virtue in the future, we must

pack the youngster off to England, and send him to a good sound school there."

"I don't like getting at a man's feelings through his children. You see, boy, I've kids of my own, and I'm more fond of them than you're likely to guess."

"Do you think," said Fenner with some temper, "that you are the only man in the world with natural affections? I hate doing it, as I said before, but there doesn't seem any other way of pinning the Kaid. Besides, it will be for the boy's good. He will be brought up as an English gentleman, instead of as a Moorish savage."

"Very well," said Kettle reluctantly, "have it your own way, but you're breaking out into a line I don't quite like."

"And spoiling what promised to be a very neat scrap," said McTodd.

"Oh! the deuce take the pair of you!" said Fenner disgustedly. But he called in the child, who came to him delightedly, with his plaited scalp-lock flowing out behind him. When Martin Fenner had decided on a policy he always carried it through, and left his own private tastes outside the bargain.

With the child in their possession, they waited placidly till a slave came into the garden courtyard,

watering the flowers. Him they sent to fetch the Kaid, who came with promptness.

Now Hadj Mohammed Bergash was no fool, and moreover, he loved his son—who was now his only child—more than all his other possessions, including his own life. He came down hurriedly, and stood in the doorway of the store-room. In a glance he saw how matters had rearranged themselves, and in a moment he made a decision as to what should be his action. Without a word the Sheik went on his knees, and with lowered head placed Captain Kettle's one foot on his turban. Kettle smoked, but made no movement or comment. But there was satisfaction in the cock of his beard.

"If the father breaks faith," said Fenner, "the son must pay."

"Then," said the Kaid, "for the future, my son's life is safe."

"The Excellency McTodd sails to-morrow for England with a loaded steamer. The boy goes with him, and there shall be well tended, and shall gain the learning and skill of the English. So when it comes his turn to rule, he shall be well equipped."

"If he is there taught to forget that Allah is Allah, and that He has but one prophet, then would I rather my son should die before he left Casadir."

"He shall remain Muslim——"

"Ahem," interrupted Kettle. "Unless the claims of the Wharfedale Particular Methodists——"

"I give you my word of honor, Kaid, the boy shall not have his faith interfered with, so long as you remain true to us."

"Oh," snarled Kettle, "let the brat remain damned if you prefer it. Arrange the matter to suit yourselves. I was only offering him a sound, sure thing."

"Remains to settle the matter of these French and Germans," said Fenner.

"You shall have their heads delivered on your carpet," protested the Kaid eagerly, "this very afternoon."

"Not so. The action would cause too much grief to their friends at home, and more warships would come than we could conveniently argue with. But your subjects here in Casadir must do no trade with them, and then presently they will depart."

"From every Moorish trader, O Excellency-with-the-great-nose, who sells to these men as much as a skin of oil, I will lop the hands, and nail them above his door as a warning. And if a Jehudi tries it, I will take the hide off him and stuff it with straw."

"Well," said Fenner thoughtfully, "we will arrange the proper form repressive measures ought to take afterward. But I see you have got hold

of the right idea. You have my permission to depart."

Hadj Mohammed Bergash went out into the garden then, but Captain Owen Kettle sat where he was on a bale, and pulled at his pointed red beard with some annoyance. "Dash!" he said. "You've had your own way, boy, but I don't think I altogether like it. I don't see what's wrong with Kaid Kettle as a title. It goes well, and, by James, I could have filled the ticket as well as any man living."

"But think," said McTodd, "once you've learnt your steps, you'll be able to wear your handsomely inlaid leg every day with perfect security. We that are now so wealthy ought to get rid of the desire for scrapping, and cultivate more taste for ornament. I think myself I shall get the diamond ring that Jew recommended, if I can pick up an imitation one, cheap."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST ADVENTURE OF CAPTAIN KETTLE.

CAPTAIN KETTLE wedged himself more tightly into the settee, and jammed the toe of his wooden leg against a batten in the chart-house floor.

"The old packet has got a roll on her and that's a fact," said Mr. McTodd. "And it's breezing up. Let's be thankful that you and I are passengers, and not aboard in offeecial positions. I bet those ducks down in the engine-room are half scared out of their greasy lives every time she races. The condition of the thrust-blocks is just scandalous."

"We've cut it fine on repairs, I'll admit," said Kettle. "And, besides, the old *Frying-pan's* never been what you might call a new ship ever since we've known her. I can picture Captain Walkfield's anxiety," he added with a sigh.

"But man Kettle, we're not responsible now, that's where the humor comes in. It's Walkfield and the engine-room staff that are responsible now if we're all drowned, and you and I are just bloated passengers. That's what tickles me. But you were saying?——"

"I was telling you the gentleman's name is Hunter, and Mrs. Kettle writes me that he's a stuff merchant in Bradford, a very respectable occupation."

"Which daughter?" asked McTodd, relighting the stump of his cigar.

"Eldest."

"But I thought she was engaged to a young fellow named——well, it wasn't Hunter. I mind ye read me out the letter which brought the announcement one morning in Casadir after old Kaid Bergash had sent me and Fenner a present of poisoned *cous cousoo.*"

"Well," snapped the little sailor, "I'll not deny that my girl's been asked before, and had three engagements that have dangled. But she's getting on a bit now, and it's time (so the Missis writes) that she was settled. The fellow's no chicken, either, from what I gather. He has been running after four different girls a year ever since he grew a mustache, and so should have experience enough to make a valuable husband."

"He sounds a slippery one." Mr. McTodd rubbed his grimy hands. "Man, you'll no' think it, but I've been slippery wi' the weemin mysel'. Gosh! if Walkfield lets her go on rolling in the trough like this, he'll shake the funnel out of her next. It used to be landladies' daughters wi' me, then it was

theatricals, and then it was landladies. My latest was a weedow—Scottish. I'm thinking it was my enormous wealth she was after; but anyway, she gave me much flattery, and I enjoyed it. I mind one very humorous scene between us in a hansom cab. We'd just come out of the Trocadero——"

"You dissolute mechanic! I'll thank you not to compare a daughter of mine with any woman who'd walk out with you in a public place like that."

"But, man, where's the harm in taking your lady friends to see a barmaid? It's a barmaid you married yourself."

"Mrs. Kettle," said her husband stiffly, "was a lady of good family, though once in reduced circumstances. She was a clergyman's daughter—Congregational. It's her direct wish that all allusion to her former business occupation should be avoided, and if she says a thing like that, I'm the man to see it carried out. So if any son of a dog wants to know exactly what broken ribs feel like, he's just to bring up that subject, and I'll show him in two twinkles."

The engineer winked a malicious eye, and would probably have continued the conversation, but just then, in one of her heavier lurches, the *Frying-pan* took a sea green and solid over her bridge deck, and the house was buried in an avalanche of roaring,

spouting, raging water. It squelched in above the doorcombings, it poured in a solid stream through the roof ventilator, and when outside it had drained away, there remained within a private lake, lively with the manœuvres of a fleet of shoes and camp stools.

"Very humorous," said McTodd, tucking up his legs. "Imagine Walkfield's anxiety, and him a man of no nerve. He'll be getting at the whiskey bottle presently."

"He'll not dare with me on board." Kettle squinted up at the hanging compass. "He's eight points off his course, as it is. I think he'd be well advised to put her head on to it a bit more, and risk the engines racing. But it's not for me to interfere."

"Speaking just as a passenger, I've a mind that if those engines have an opportunity to race thoroughly, about twice and no more, they'll break down permanently in six different places. It's splendid to think of those ducks down in the engine-room sweating and straining for their dear lives, and thinking of new swears between whiles. Eh, man Kettle, expeerience is a fine thing when you're lying luxuriously at ease like this, and want to picture the depths from which yer talents have digged ye—I'll trouble ye for matches. Mine's soaked."

Again the *Frying-pan* took it green over the top of her superstructure, and again the drench of yeasty water roared over the chart-house, and squirted noisily through ventilators and crevices.

"There's a heavy breeze and that's a fact," grumbled Kettle. "And there's far too bad a sea running to monkey with. I want to get home to see my girl married to this Hunter, and if this goes on I'm afraid I shan't. I wish Walkfield had a bit more nerve and a lot more brain. Being just a bally passenger——"

"It would be most unprofessional of you to supply them. Man, it's splendidly comical for both of us. It's like reading *Punch;* there's a lot of wit spread about if you can only find it."

Captain Kettle bit on the stump of a cold, wet cigar, and presently, finding the stump of a pencil and a piece of limp white paper among the swirl of oddments on the floor, betook himself to that making of verse which had brought him consolation in the midst of so many former difficulties. McTodd chuckled over his thoughts. It was quite an hour later that Captain Walkfield looked in upon them.

The man was obviously in liquor, and indeed made no attempt to conceal it. "Well," he said, "I guess we're booked. The old *Frying-pan* will take us to Jones in another hour unless the weather eases, and

there's no signs of that. I always did say it was a cold job dying sober, and I daresay you've thought the same yourself, old cock."

This last was addressed to Kettle, and that small mariner stood upright with a sudden jerk.

"By James, do you know you're addressing your owner? Where's your proper respect? D'you think that's the way to speak to your superiors, you half-baked scum of a Newport coal-shoot? By dash, your collar's as rotten as the rest of you. Is there no part of your useless carcass that isn't too limp for me to handle?"

From the other settee there came a chuckle. "Man Kettle, but it's most unprofessional for a mere passenger to get handling the skipper."

"You shut your head, or I'll clean the floor with you, too. Look at this thing that used to be called Walkfield until I took it in hand and altered it. Just think that it carries a full master's ticket, and the hands have to touch hats to it, and speak of it as the Old Man. Why, I could make a better ship-master out of Norie's 'Epitome' and a handful of putty."

"Don't throw it round any more," suggested McTodd, "or you'll wreck the deck-house. I think it's quite dead now. Better sling it overboard."

"You let me alone," groaned a very disheveled

Captain Walkfield from the corner by the wash-stand. "I've done my best, and if we are to be drowned it's your fault. The old packet's under-manned and underfound in every way."

Again Kettle turned fiercely against him. "As if that was any argument. Steamers are run to pay, not to make private yachts for their skippers. What ship, I should like to know, ever had enough men of a crew, or all the repairs she indented for, unless she was a man-of-war? A skipper's hired because he's supposed to have brains clever enough and hands strong enough to make up those deficiencies. I've spent a whole lifetime doing it, so I know. But you, you whiskey-tinctured jellyfish——"

Once more the sodden steamer rolled her bridge deck under, and this time, as Walkfield had left the chart-house door open behind him, the sea came in green and solid, filling the place with violent water. In due time they emerged from this, spluttering and profane, and, in Captain Walkfield's case, hopeless.

"There," he said, "you can see for yourself. She can't live much longer with the sea running."

"Get back to your work, you hound!" Kettle shouted at him.

"I tell you it's useless, and anyway I'm disabled. I believe you've broken me some ribs."

"Good," said Kettle, "then if you tell me officially

you're not fit to carry on duty, I'll just step in as substitute"—the little man breathed pleasurably—"I've almost forgotten how to handle a crew," he said, as he went out on deck, "but I daresay it will come back to me."

"Cocky little fool!" snarled Walkfield.

"You shut your blasted head," said McTodd politely, "or I'll throw your twaddling carcass into the ditch. There's only one man I allow to abuse Captain Kettle, and that's mysel'. You can stay here in the chart-house and get washed sober. If any one calls in to inquire, you may say I've gone to the engine-room to get a smell of warmth, and watch those ducks down there at work."

Out on deck the prospect was cheerless enough. The steamer was in the Bay, and Biscay weather was at its worst. The gale blew with hungry violence, and the great crested seas that drove before it stumbled and snarled, till all order of their charge was lost, and they fled in confused rout. Their tops were whipped off by the wind, and blew in a gray smother that was almost as solid as the water itself.

Captain Kettle introduced himself to the dejected mates and the scared deckhands in a method peculiarly his own, and though he did not perhaps convince them that the *Frying-pan* would eventually escape swamping, at any rate he demonstrated to

them that they were not drowned yet, and were still capable of appreciating pain and indignities as administered by himself. It took him a good hour to bring about this new phase of discipline, but once it was established, he directed a very sore and angry crew to set up extra funnel stays, to replace the tarpaulins on number two hatch, and to clear away the wreckage of the after wheel-house, which was doing its best to jam the steering-gear.

At the end of this time a very composed McTodd clawed away up to him on the reeling upper bridge, and bawled in his ear above the howl of the gale, "Man, but even you'd laugh if you'd step down into yon engine-room. They're steaming on one boiler now. They've cut the other out. It's adrift. You can see it gather more way ever time she rolls, and presently it will wrench itself clear of seacocks and steampipes and all its connections."

"Will it go through the ship's side?"

"It might or it mightn't, though I'm a full believer in the rottenness of everything on board. But whether it rolls out through her ribs into the Atlantic, or whether it stays in its steps, makes very little difference to the professional feelings of yon crowd in the engine-room. Ye're a layman yourself, and cannot understand these niceties, but I may indicate that to be pointed out in any barroom (if

you chance to survive) as an engineer that's had his boilers adrift is very injurious to the finer sentiments."

"I care not one jot for their feelings," said Kettle violently. "The black gang on this packet seem just as incompetent as the deck crowd. You'd better take over charge yourself."

"It would be most revolutionary. The chief here has read all the books that were ever written, and he's certificates enough to fill the low press cylinder. Now I don't carry a chief's certificate. That blighted Board of Trade refused me one. They did not sufficiently admire my spelling."

"Mac," said Kettle, looking him in the eyes, "if I didn't know you to be the most able man in the ship, do you think I should ask you to interfere? Besides, it's a special case. I've lived hard; latterly I've made money; and now I want to get home to the farm, and see the Missis and my girls again. And there's another thing. There's a chapel up there in Wharfedale of which I am boss. I started it; I worked out a new kind of creed; and if I got home again I believe I could add to the congregation. It would be just maddening to drown out here without a chance."

"D'ye think you're the only man with ambition? Here's me just ravening to display my wealth in

Ballindrochater. It's where I was born, and it's a place that hitherto I have not distinguished myself in. If I get home, I'm going to have a public dinner given me in Ballindrochater, though I have to pay for it mysel'. It's a thing I've been figuring on for years."

But to cure the errant boiler was a task beyond even Mr. N. A. McTodd's vigor. The gale hardened down into something very nearly approaching a hurricane, and the run of the sea grew more terrible. The loose boiler threatened every moment to take charge, and to ease it of its own weight of water they ran the scalding contents out into the stokehold. The fires were drenched, the ship out of all steam command. On deck Kettle hove her to with a sea anchor of derricks and a swamped boat—and lost three men, crushed to death or washed overboard in the process. Below—with all his bilge pumps out of action—McTodd arranged bucket gangs to bale the engine-room and stokeholds clear by hand.

The steamer was old and tender, and through many a long year concrete had been applied to her internally to stop leaks. Her rolling and bucking and plunging among the seas loosened much of this, and already before steam gave out the bilge pumps had been running to their full capacity in dealing with the leaks. With the bilge pumps standing, it

was more than the buckets could do with the uttermost strain to keep these inrushes in check.

The men worked with that frenzied energy which men can put out when their own lives hang on their efforts. Mr. McTodd was here, there and everywhere, encouraging them to do a little more than their best; and occasionally he assisted his tuition with a three-quarter inch spanner. The mates and the deckhands all worked at this intolerable baling. Captain Owen Kettle stumped about the bridge deck, or sat in the chart-house watching the ship, and attending briskly to his duties as her master when occasion arose.

For a night and a day this terrible work went on, and by degrees the weather eased; but human endurance has its limits, and the baling eased also. There was no question of getting fires again in the remaining boiler's furnaces. There were ten feet of water in the stokehold—and—it was not diminishing. Rivets were out all over her, and there was a weep round the lap-joints of every plate. There was no blinking the fact that she was gradually settling.

Of her four boats two had been stove in davits, and then swept away by the seas; one made part of the sea anchor and was wrecked beyond repair; one alone remained seaworthy. This last Kettle meas-

ured, and then made thoughtful calculation. She was built as a lifeboat, with air-lockers, and at the utmost would carry seventeen people. There were twenty-one souls on board.

Then he went into the chart-house again and examined the glass. It had risen since the last gale, and now it was steadily sinking.

"Ah, well," he said, "there's no wriggling out of it this trip."

He opened a drawer and pulled out notepaper. He tore off twenty narrow slips, and seventeen of these he marked with a big blue pencilled B. Then he folded these separately, and threw them into Captain Walkfield's shore-going felt hat.

When the hands assembled on the bridge deck some five minutes later, they showed no surprise at being ordered to leave the ship. For one thing they were too numbed with weariness for any great display of emotion, and for another it was obvious that such an order must come sooner or later. They dipped for seats in the boat, and those that drew a B out of the hat showed no undue elation, and those that picked the blanks took their luck stolidly.

A knot of men cast off the awning lacings of the boat; two threw out her davit tackles and overhauled them; the rest ran to the galley and pantries, collecting scraps of food and bottles of water.

"I'm sorry for these ducks we must leave behind," said McTodd, who had drawn a seat.

"We're obliged to you for your kind sympathy," said Kettle.

"You! But, man, you're not going to stay. You're rich. Your life's of value. You're never going to chuck it away."

"I've got to stand by the ship."

"Rubbish. Ye're a passenger. It's the duty of all passengers to be saved first thing."

"I was a passenger, but my nasty bossing way got the better of me as usual. If I'd remained a passenger a seat in that boat would have been mine by rights, and I'd have it if I had to break up half the hands to get there. But I didn't know when I was well off. I fired Walkfield and made myself skipper in his place, and, by James, skipper I've got to be, and I must stand by the old packet while there's any one else left on her. There's another reason, too, why I didn't draw. Gambling's distinctly frowned upon by the Wharfedale Particular Methodists."

The engineer drew a face of dismay.

"Your releegious objections to a flutter I consider just absurd. But you're sound about what's due from a skipper. Man, I'm awful sorry to lose ye, but there's no choice."

"No," said Kettle, "no choice. There, hurry, man, and get down into that boat, or those tailors will have her stove against the ship's side, and we shall all be in the soup."

The engineer boarded the leaping boat, and the others joined him. She was cast off, and a wave spurned her from the ship's side. A mast was stepped and a rag of a sail hoisted, and away she drove with frightened haste before the rising gale.

One last glance of Captain Kettle they had as the steamer bowed over the flank of a sea, and her chart-house was displayed to them through its doorway. Captain Kettle, with his wooden leg wedged against a deck cleat, sat on one of the settees. A great cigar was smoking in his mouth. A paper block was on his knee, and he was writing rapidly. There was a certain grim look of satisfaction on his face, that was carried out even in the truculent cock of his red torpedo beard.

. . . . . .

The news of the steamer's loss received scarcely so much as a paragraph's notice at first in the English papers. But presently there arrived in England from Morocco a certain Mr. Martin Fenner, who straightway foregathered with a mournful McTodd. They had their talk, a pitiful sorrowing talk of old times, and then Fenner said: "I shan't go back to

Casadir. I haven't the heart to. I liked Kettle more than any one else on earth, I think."

"Me too. He was a good little beggar. I shan't go back either. It will be a pity. Kaid Bergash will lose his stiffening without us, and then the Sultan of Morocco will come down and cut off every head that wags in the Sus country, and all our work will go for nothing except the sordid dollar making."

Fenner rubbed at his great beak of a nose. "No, I'm hanged if that brute of a Sultan shall clip in now. We at least owe that to Kettle's memory. His work is good enough to be made permanent. England's strong just at present, and she's nothing on hand. By gad, I'll work the Government to proclaim a protectorate over the district."

Now, "working the Government" is not a thing to be done in a moment, because governments have a fine sense of their own dignity, and are not apt to move with any haste. But, as Fenner said, even the Press could have its uses, and here was one of them.

Their previous exploits in the Sus country had been ignored, or merely stigmatized as piratical. But Fenner got hold of an interviewer and explained them picturesquely. He lived at the Cecil, and was readily accessible to any pressman who cared to

call; and as he exuded good copy for the asking, the pressmen called in numbers.

Through this medium, then, the British public were informed of the pit from which Southern Morocco had been digged, of the pleasant prosperity to which it had ascended, and the blight of the Sultan with which it was now threatened. Fenner talked of Kettle with an appreciative tongue. There was a man of genius, a man of brazen bravery, a man of infinite tact and organizing power—in fact, an Empire builder! Moreover, he was a man who did not advertise.

And the public were quick to catch at this fact and applaud it. Advertisers they had always with them. But such men as this Kettle are very rare. From being an unknown adventurer, Captain Owen Kettle suddenly leapt into being talked of as one of the most eminent constructive politicians of the century. Men turned up army lists to find his regiment. Ladies wore a Kettle button as a brooch. All mourned his untimely cutting off.

A sculptor, struck by a happy idea, modeled in clay a "Captain O. Kettle" brandishing a sword (one of the few weapons he had never touched) and apparently leading on troops. It was the hit of a good Academy.

Of the man himself only one further message

came in. A bottle thrown up beside the red rocks on a Biarritz beach held some mildewed paper, with the writing almost obliterated. Two lines alone could be distinguished:

"And wayward fortune thus did settle
Captain the Revd. Owen Kettle."

This was suppressed; his taste for poetry was not mentioned, and, indeed, many of the little mariner's other traits shared the same oblivion; he appeared only as a strong man, the unappreciated man, the neglected man. A Kettle cult arose, which deplored the fact so great, so wonderful a life could have been passed in the quiet shelter of obscurity. On the *de mortuis* principle none of his many faults were remembered. It was only his virtues that were recounted.

Thus daily his halo grew, and presently a movement was set afoot to cast the Academy statue in bronze, and have it set up in one of London's thoroughfares. The idea was kept hot; an enthusiast promised to defray the cost; a committee was formed and approached a Cabinet Minister as to a site.

Now a psychological moment then just arrived, and it suited the Government to yield to public clamor. They "acceded to the urgent prayer" of

the Kaid of Sus (who had so recently made himself an independent potentate), and in view of the large number of British subjects residing in his Highness's dominions, they proclaimed a British protectorate over the country.

Accurately, the British subjects in Casadir and in all the Sus country at that particular moment consisted of some ten or thirteen Gibraltar scorpions. But these were enough for diplomatic purposes, and the patriotism of the Government was acclaimed by a delighted country.

The Colonial Secretary, brimming with enthusiasm for himself, received the Kettle Statue Committee (with their attendant train of reporters) and delivered himself of an important and epoch-making speech, which an hour later was buzzing over the wires to every capital in Europe.

At the end, and, in fact, like a lady's postscript, he alluded to the point that had brought them together. The permanent officials had informed him that there was strong precedent why His Majesty's Government could not grant permission to erect the statue of this noble Empire-builder as desired. No one regretted this decision more than himself, but there was the precedent, and it must be abided by. As a solace he might say that, had Captain Kettle fortunately survived, he would have felt it his ob-

vious duty to have recommended such a national benefactor to His Majesty as a Knight Commander of the Bath.

The papers, one and all, reported this almost verbatim next morning; one even went so far as to head its column: "The late Sir Owen Kettle K.C.B." All the Britons proclaimed the justice of the promotion, and if the Continental Press did grow spiteful over the "decoration of another English pirate," that (so thought his friends) would only make poor Kettle appreciate his honors all the more.

And then on the crest of this wave of hero-worship, there was emitted on to these shores, by the help of a distressed mariner's free pass, a spruce Captain Owen Kettle in the lean, spare flesh.

The country of course shouted with joy, but their shouts were a trifle flat and forced. The man had been dead, and they had worshipped him. It would be embarrassing to any sect if all its saints returned to life.

In very tense language the papers described the final sinking of that redoubtable steamer, the *Frying-pan,* the rescue of her remaining people by a four-masted sailing ship bound for Melbourne, and the subsequent disablement of this vessel by a tornado, which explained her lengthy voyage. The public

took but a languid interest in it all, and in two days the subject lapsed.

But the Colonial Secretary, to his honor be it said, remembered his word. The British Government is slow to move, but once it is pledged to any course, either for good or evil, it usually keeps its promise. The red-tape knots were untied. The slow machinery of actual promotion was thrown in gear, and the clutch slid home.

In the meanwhile, a joyful Kettle, preceded by telegrams, raced to Skipton, and over into Wharfedale, and as he told me himself (with a moist eye) the welcome of Mrs. Kettle and his daughters was worth the waiting for. It was long years since he had last seen the farm; through force of circumstances his correspondence had been something of the most irregular; but through all that weary exile he had been working with both eyes on them, and (low be it confessed), with very small thought for the welfare of the British Empire. It was only incidentally that the Empire had profited.

But the wheels of promotion, if they were geared low, slipped no cogs. It was the morning of the eldest Miss Kettle's marriage to Mr. Hunter, of Bradford, that the massive blue envelope arrived, and it was a Lady Kettle who gave her daughter away, and a Rev. Sir Owen Kettle K.C.B. who

(with the assistance of a registrar) married them. Never before has the one and only chapel dedicated to the Wharfedale Particular Methodist faith seen such a glittering ceremony, and till the next Miss Kettle quits the maiden state it is not likely to see such another.

There was a reception afterward at the farm, and Fenner, with a nose that was more masterful than ever, made a speech that was not all that could be desired. His own keen and hopeless desire for domestic joys led him sometimes into statements which were embarrassing. McTodd was there, also, and kept sober. Mr. McTodd had recently been made a freeman of Ballindrochater, and was much impressed with the honor, and with the cost and uselessness of the free library which had procured it for him.

So here we leave Sir Owen Kettle K.C.B., master mariner and pastor, in the odor of that home for which he had sighed during so many battling years, a man looked up to and respected, even by the many who disagree with most of his opinions.

There is a colony of brown-headed gulls which breed in a scaur above the farm, and earn a livelihood in the fields, and in the shallows of the Wharfe. The mewings of these sometimes fall on the little sailor's ears, and his eyes look on the distance, and

his mind goes to scenes far from Wharfedale, wild scenes, fierce scenes, where strenuous men . . . Ah, well!

But he has always a reserve of strength sufficient to pull himself from this violent past, and one touch of his wife's hand is enough to bring him back again to pleasurable contentment.

THE END.

MAY 12 1903

1 COPY DEL. TO CAT. DIV.
MAY 13 1903

MAY 18 1903

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00022049033